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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

A MERCURY PUBLICATION

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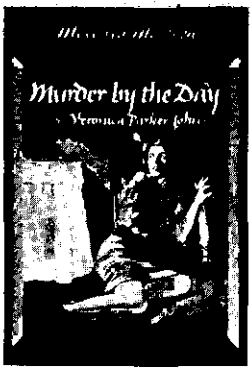

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

including **BLACK MASK MAGAZINE**

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The best of the new and the best of the old

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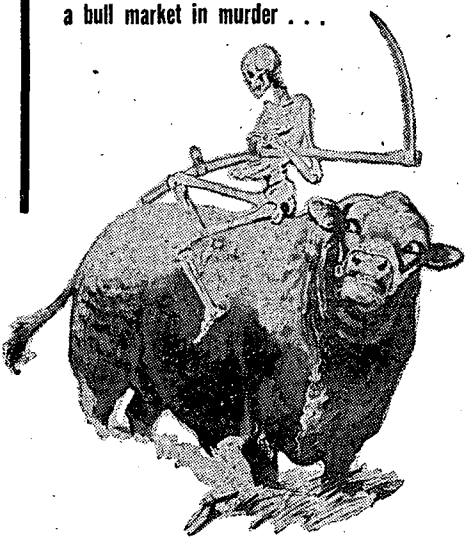

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For a long time now we have been wanting to make an editorial experiment — to publish a short novel in EQMM as a 2-part serial. But every time we reached the point of decision, we were held up by a seemingly insurmountable drawback — the time-lag of a full month between the end of Part One and the beginning of Part Two. Can a reader wait that long between installments and not feel the sharp edge of the suspense blunted? Can any amount of excitement be kept alive for a whole month? We don't think so — no matter how gripping a "cliff-hanger" comes at the end of Part One. So, each time we were tempted to offer you a 2-part serial, we resisted.

Then we got an idea.

There is one way to publish a 2-part serial without making the reader wait between installments — and that is to include both parts in the same issue!

No sooner conceived than done!

Here, then, is a brand-new short novel by Roy Vickers — the first half at the beginning of this issue and the second half at the end. You may pause between the two parts, if you wish, or you may continue right on — whichever method of reading you happen to prefer . . .

In our April 1954 issue, four months ago, we gave you Roy Vickers's "Double Image," winner of the First Prize in EQMM's Ninth Annual Contest. We described this story, you will remember, as a brilliant tour de force. Well, Mr. Vickers's new short novel is a case of literary lightning striking twice in the same magazine: it too is a brilliant tale of detection, and without question a tour de force. Again Roy Vickers has come up with an original and ingenious variation of the "inverted detective story" technique — and again EQMM has come up with

the unusual
the unorthodox
and the unexpected

FIND THE INNOCENT

by ROY VICKERS

OUR NEWSPAPERS BEING WHAT they are, it was inevitable that Veronica Brengast should be featured as the woman in the Case of the Sand Bin Murder — even before a single reporter knew that she was involved. Her awkward name flattened out the headlines, but her photograph was

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front-page material. True, her blonde coloring was lost, but her unequivocal outline remained.

Veronica was pose-proof. No one could go wrong with the bone structure that would set artists doodling — the nose with the ghost of a tilt and the mouth that was so very nearly too large. She was camera shy, with the indirect result that her fastidious self-esteem came out as something else — something rather cunning and even a little leery — altogether, a news-editor's dream.

Her eyes she knew to be exquisite, and for that reason, no doubt, kept putting off a visit to the oculist. For lack of reading glasses — and she need never have worn them when her husband was about — she mistook a 6 for a 9. Also, she failed to notice that his letter was addressed and airmailed from Dublin, and told the police he had written from Madrid.

The frequency of her husband's business trips contributed to her contentment, though she had hitherto made no illicit use of his absence. Ever since he had bought himself an airplane, he seemed to dodge about for the fun of the thing. The letter was dated June 5, the previous day.

Dearest Veronica — he was in his forties, nearly twenty years older than Veronica and inclined to formality by post — *I shall arrive at Diddington airport at 6 tomorrow (Tuesday). Please meet me — as I have to return the following day. Come by train. You will remember that I left the Daimler here. We'll drive to Renchester — it's only about 30 miles. Keep this under your hair as I wish to pay a surprise visit to the new depot. I shall go round after dinner, but it won't take more than an hour, and then we can have a nice long evening together. I hope you have missed me as much as I've missed you. Your loving husband, William Brengast.*

The 6, though sprawly, was not very much like a 9. Moreover, she might have reasoned that sitting down to supper in a Renchester hotel at about 10 at the earliest, and adding an hour for his inspection of his business premises, would not leave much of an evening. But arithmetic was never Veronica's strong suit. Also, her husband, she said, paid little attention to the clock when he had no business appointment. You can ignore her footling little excuses — you can assume that very shapely head to have been full of felonious intent — yet it remains impossible that she could have served any purpose whatever by turning up, as she did, shortly after 8.

At that small airfield there was no need to make inquiries — they knew by inference that she was Brengast's wife and that Brengast had expected her to meet him. He had left no message, but had been heard to mutter that his wife could not have received his letter. It was believed that he had gone to Renchester. There was no direct railway line to Renchester.

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"Then I must hire a car," she said.

Diddington was little more than a large village. There was one sizeable garage. The garage hand, who was filling the tank of a Morris, informed her that their one car was not expected back before midnight. In his driving mirror, the owner of the Morris had seen Veronica's coloring as well as her outline.

"I'm on my way to Renchester," he offered, and leaped out. "May I give you a lift?"

Veronica thanked him magnificently and allowed him to help her into the Morris. As they drove off she tried to listen to his chatter, but soon her responses became mechanical, while her thoughts were bent on framing an explanation her husband would be likely to accept. Her host was a hardboiled commercial traveler who had reduced his relations with women to a formula: "If there's nothing doing, there's no harm done."

It was Veronica's fault for not giving him proper attention. His preliminary patter, progressive in form, was fair warning even for the most inexperienced. When his left hand strayed from the steering, her right hand turned the ignition key. She got out and turned her back until he had driven off.

The fastidious self-esteem had landed her, with a suitcase, on a secondary road, miles from anywhere. It was now a quarter to 9. After what seemed a very long wait, a lorry came into sight. She picked up the suitcase. Though she smiled — and with some emphasis — the driver shook his head and drove on. She calculated that there would be little more than an hour of daylight. She would have to walk until she came to a house with a telephone.

Her shoes were not designed for walking on a country road — nor was her nature. She was one of those in whom an abundance of money, far from corrupting, stimulates the good qualities. She was kindly, unpretentious, sympathetic, ungrudging of time and effort to help a sick acquaintance — untouched by malice or any kind of cattiness. The tiger characteristics did not emerge until she had brought herself face-to-face with poverty — meaning no money at all unless she earned it.

As she trudged on, petulance at her husband's behavior began to verge on ill-temper. It was inconsiderate of him to come home suddenly in this furtive way. Keep it under her hair! She would have to catch an early train tomorrow back to their London flat to welcome Jill, his niece, who was coming to stay for a week of her holiday. She liked Jill in spite of the fact that she was one of those clever girls who earned a high salary.

She had never before seen the countryside from the view of a tramp. She hated it. It was vast and monotonous. In the middle distance, a meaningless little river reflected the sunset, dazzling her. Her hat — a tiny summer straw, trimmed with roses — was no protection. So she had to walk with her head turned sideways.

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She came to a bend in the road with trees on both sides which shut out the sunset and brought the first feeling of fear. She had never spent a night in the open. Her suitcase, she discovered with surprise, was frightfully heavy.

A steep descent with a double hairpin brought her into the valley, where the road ran beside the river. Half a mile ahead was an ugly little house which appeared to have been built in the middle of the river — as indeed it had been, with a weir on one side of it and a lock on the other, the house itself standing on a natural island suitably reinforced. She could see a tug maneuvering barges into the lock. Ten minutes later she was near enough to note that a telephone wire ran to the house.

A ramp from the road gave access to the lock. She had already observed the man sitting motionless on the lock gate, holding a fishing rod. As she turned onto the ramp, he drew in his line, laid down the rod, and came to meet her.

She intended to ask permission to telephone for a car, but lost her intention. Lockkeepers, she had supposed, were grizzled ex-sailors eking out their pension. This man could be little more than her own age. He was not a bit like a lockkeeper — there came to her the odd thought that he was not a bit like any man she had ever met. She decided to say, "Good evening," but instead she said:

"You see what's happened?"

He smiled understanding, giving her the feeling that the whole business of being stranded was at an end, that it didn't matter, that it hadn't happened.

He took her suitcase, with care to avoid touching her.

"Put your hand on the lever and tread between the ridges, or you'll hurt your feet," he advised. She followed him over the lock gates, thinking more of the man than of his advice. She tripped on one of the ridges and in saving herself displaced his fishing rod. He caught the butt as it pivoted. She felt a light tug at the right cuff of her coat.

"Keep still!" he warned. "I'm afraid the hook has caught you." Her hand rested on the lever of the gate; he peered at the cuff. "It can't prick you — it's embedded sideways." With thumb and finger he snapped the gut just above the hook. "I have a tool that will get the hook out without hurting the cloth."

How complete he was, she thought, as if all the men in the world were rolled into one in order to take care of her. It was because she was so tired. She stepped from the gangway to a concrete path and then to a strip of lawn between two formal flowerbeds which looked as if they had been snipped out of a municipal park. But Veronica could see only a rustic retreat set in a landscape that had suddenly acquired a breath-taking beauty. The man put down her suitcase, slipped into the house, and returned with a couple of deck chairs. He opened one and steadied her into it politely.

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She closed her eyes.

"Thank you! I'll try and behave properly in a minute."

"There's no hurry."

The pain in her feet was flowing away. She closed her eyes again. When she opened them he was holding a large kitchen tray on which were two glasses.

"Gin and orange juice! I thought it a safer bet than rum or whiskey." He opened the other chair. He was drinking rum.

A strange ease crept over Veronica as she sipped her drink in silence. There was no need to make small talk to this man who so easily shared her mood. She was acutely conscious of him, yet incurious. Her fatigue passed so quickly that she became aware of something unusual happening to her. She forced herself back to earth.

"I shall have to see the lockkeeper presently and borrow his telephone."

"Presently," he echoed, and added, "I am the lockkeeper."

She turned and looked at him, learning nothing she did not know already — that he was young, vital, magnetically tuned to herself.

"It's a holiday stunt," he explained. "We're a stag party of three. There's practically no river traffic, but there has to be someone here while the regular man is in the hospital. We tossed odd-man-out for duty tonight, and I lost. The other two are out." He expanded: "The fishing attracted us. You see, we have to keep together for our work. But you fish *singly!* So we took the job for the house."

She liked his voice and wanted him to go on talking.

"And do you do your own housework and cooking?"

"We keep the place from getting definitely filthy. We stick to the directions on the tins. We always wash up after a meal. Now and again we sneak off to Renchester."

"Oh!" She was back on earth again and it hurt.

"You're on your way to Renchester," he interpreted. "You're only here by chance. Mischance, from your point of view."

"Is it mischance?"

"One of the million-to-one kind. You'll have to go, of course. Let's get it over. I'll do the telephoning. What's your name?"

"My name doesn't suit me at all. I've always thought of myself as 'Caroline.' " For an instant only she paused. "And I've always thought of you as 'Peter.' "

He nodded as if he had expected her to say it.

"We're letting ourselves in for it," he said calmly. "My fault for showing that I dread the moment when you will be getting into that car."

"It isn't your fault or mine. I felt it when you put down that fishing rod and looked at me."

"So did I. Do you realize we're talking love-at-first-sight nonsense? Why — good lord, you're a beautiful woman!"

"If I am, you've only just this moment noticed it. You fell in love with me first."

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There was no more than a faint glow from the sunset — just enough for her wedding ring to catch his eye. He put his finger on it, touching only the metal.

"Does this mean anything?"

"It did. Now it means as little to me as it has always done to him."

He drew the ring from her finger, held it poised on his thumbnail, then flipped it into the air. With a tiny splash it fell into the lock.

Silence again. Thought of each was carried to the other on the whispering rush of water over the weir. In front of them a vapor spiraled thinly from the lock.

He raised her from the deck chair and took her into the house.

Around 1 in the morning, the siren of a tug called him from her side.

"There'll be another customer in an hour and a half," he told her, after operating the lock. "He will have four barges, and it'll take me about ten minutes to clear them. I forgot to offer you a meal. We'll have supper."

He led her into the sitting room, lit an oil lamp, and himself retired to the kitchen.

She took face tissue from her bag and, standing before a speckled mirror set in an overmantel, repaired her make-up as well as she could in the bad light. She dropped the tissue in the fireplace, which was already in use as a wastepaper basket.

This was the real lockkeeper's furniture — Victorian, ugly but solid — on the walls an oleograph and prints, spotted with damp. There was no bookcase, but there were books on the floor — held upright against the skirting board by means of a wading boot.

On the table in front of her were two novels, a handbook on coarse fishing, and a small camera. The next moment she caught her breath.

Brengast Accessories, Ltd.
WillyBee Products

It was embossed in red on the flap of an envelope which was partly covered by the camera. Her heart thumped, then steadied. It did not necessarily mean that this man was connected with her husband's company. He might have bought one of the products, she told herself, not knowing that the company did not deal directly with the public.

Without scruple she picked up the envelope. *Arthur Stranack, Esq., Peasebarrow Lock, Nr. Renchester.* What a pity his name wasn't really Peter! But it still might be. That envelope might have been addressed to one of the two other men living in the house. She slid the envelope back under the camera.

Presently he came in, bringing hot soup, which he put on the floor. It had not occurred to her to help him clear the table and lay the cloth. The soup was followed by chicken and new potatoes and a sweet.

"This must be magic!" she exclaimed. "I thought it took hours to prepare hot things."

He seemed to ponder her remark.

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"I don't know anything about fashions, but I do know a little about fabrics," he said, following his own thought. "All your clothes cost a hell of a lot. My income is less than a thousand, all told. It might be more later on, but I mean might. And apparently you've never heard of can-cookery!"

"But I have a life interest on the income of £100,000," she said. "I mean a marriage settlement. Oh, I forgot! It's *dum sola et casta*. The '*sola*' means I should lose it all if I married again, doesn't it?"

"And the rest of it means that you also lose it all in the event of your giving grounds for divorce." He glanced at the alarm clock on the overmantel — nearly 2 o'clock. "I'm afraid my existence has already cost you £100,000." Then came the challenge. "I'm sorry — if you are . . . Caroline?"

For a moment she felt dizzy. Again her heart thumped, as when she had seen the envelope under the camera.

"Peter, darling! Don't be utterly and absolutely absurd!" Her voice was edged with panic, but her eyes were cold. "We must keep our heads. Those barge men couldn't have seen me. No one knows I'm here. Your two friends! Are they coming back tonight?"

He did not immediately answer.

"I hadn't thought of it, that way," he said.

"Are they coming back tonight? Oh, do please tell me!"

"Possibly at any minute — possibly not until the middle of the morning. I had forgotten them. And now we've started remembering things. My fault for mentioning my income. What else have I made you remember? Anything at all?"

There was still hope. She groped for a dignified retreat and found it in sweet reasonableness.

"Don't spoil it all with bitterness," she entreated. "I could learn can-cookery — and everything that goes with it. If you had only a laborer's wage, I would still want to live with you and — wash your shirts and that sort of thing — but —"

"*BUT* — you don't think it would be for my good!"

"I would have to turn myself into a different kind of woman — a better kind, if you like. Only I wouldn't then be the woman you fell in love with." She added, "Any more than I am now."

"Any more than you are now!" he repeated. "Quite true! You are giving me a very vivid illusion that you are now a different woman."

"And you hate me?"

"Nonsense! I'm greatly in your debt for bringing the other woman here and letting me live a lifetime with her in a few hours. I will, of course, help you tell a lie to your husband. What do you want me to do?"

"Let me go before your friends come back."

He produced a telephone book and a railway guide.

"Can I look up anything for you?"

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"It's no good my going to Renchester now." She opened the railway guide. She knew where she intended to go — to her married sister who lived at Salisbury. Caution made her keep her plans to herself. Wheatley Junction for Salisbury. There was a train she could catch, with reasonable luck. She picked up the telephone book, found a list of six all-night garages, and memorized the first.

"And now I must ask the lock-keeper to let me use his telephone," she smiled.

"May I get you the car?" he asked woodenly.

She thanked him but preferred to make the call herself. A sleepy voice answered: "Weston's Garage, at your service." When she told him what she wanted he asked her to hold the line. Her apprehension mounted. Surely there would be no difficulty in getting a car from a large town! A hoot from the river told her that the expected "customer" had arrived. If she missed that train —

"All correct, madam! A car is starting now."

She prepared herself for the journey. She took up her coat — a yellow woollen crepe. Heavens, if he remembered that fishhook in the right cuff he would insist on removing it, and she would miss the train! She put her coat on hurriedly, then stepped into the grim little garden. On the road, a tobacco lorry, its trademark floodlit, rumbled on its way to Renchester.

"Your car hasn't come yet."

"I think I'll wait on the road."

"Very prudent. I'll take your suitcase."

"No, let me just vanish. You'll never forgive me for running away from — us?"

"What can it matter to you? You needn't be afraid I'll hit back. No one will ever know — from me — that you've been here."

There was no moon. He flashed a large torch on the gangway over the lock gates. The beam guided her to the foot of the ramp. She stood still for a moment, then walked up the ramp, and on to the road a hundred yards from the lock.

As her eyes drew level with the road, a light flashed directly in her eye, apparently coming straight at her. Then it swerved away. A little pool of light crept along the road, and was thrown back to the framework of an aluminum bicycle. The rider, she calculated, could have seen her face. He might have been a patroling policeman, which would not matter. The police were not concerned with marriage settlements. *Dum sola et casta.* The words now terrified her. In total darkness she zipped open her suitcase and groped for a scarf. She removed her hat, crushed it mercilessly into the suitcase, and then fixed the scarf over her hair, drawing the knot tightly under her chin. A minute later the headlights of the car picked her out. She stood in the beam and waved until the car drew up. The driver was an excessively cautious man.

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"Are you the lady who rang Weston's garage?" Assured that she was, he explained, "We're the Hollow Tree." He pointed to a transparency on the window, as if his word might be doubted. "They passed your call to us. Their cars were all out. Press reporters. On account there's been a murder in the town, so they told me."

"How dreadful!" said Veronica, as she got in. "It's lucky for me you could come. I simply must catch the 3:45 at Wheatley Junction."

Her sister, Alice Kortland, was the wife of a naval paymaster, at present at sea. It was broad daylight when Veronica reached the little house in the suburbs of Salisbury. The Kortlands had a small son whose school fees Veronica paid, unknown to her brother-in-law.

Alice would help.

The day which had ended with an abortive romance had begun badly for the three occupants of the lock-keeper's house. Every day began badly, if only in the sense that the three men faced each other at breakfast. Three faces — any two of which were repugnant to the third.

You can compare them with the Ganetti Trio — top-liners in the days of the music hall — whose offstage quarrels were a problem to managements. There was also the Flondbury String Quartette, who could fill a large hall anywhere, but in private life would harass each other with writs for slander, for damage to a typewriter, or some such nonsense.

The three men at the lockhouse — Arthur Stranack, Lyle Canvey, Rupert Eddis — were a trio of scientific workers, employed by Brengast Accessories. As a team they attained a level unattainable by themselves as individuals. Still under 30, they had originated most of the WillyBee Products, one of which — the Portable Air Conditioner — was doing big business.

Rupert Eddis, whose turn it was to be mess secretary and orderly man, was washing up after breakfast when the Assistant Managing Director rang up.

"Peasebarrow Lock," said Eddis.

"That's you, Eddis, isn't it? Marchmont speaking. Have you read my letter?"

"We collect our mail from the village about 11. Is WillyBee going to pay us a royalty?"

"I'm sorry, old man — no. He told me to write you — he'll be in Madrid to the end of the week and then he's going to Ireland. My letter is addressed to Stranack since he is, nominally, senior. It's short and starchy."

"Short? Does he deny that the Portable Air Conditioner has already earned £50,000, and is still in full production? Does he deny that we worked it out in our own time?"

"You're snarling at the wrong dog, Eddis. You know I've done my best for the three of you. WillyBee takes a stand on principle. You're hired as scientific assistants. If you like to do experimental work — for

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which you use his plant — and so on! He's legally correct, you know."

"Hang legalities! Anyway, thanks for trying to help us, Mr. Marchmont."

Eddis abandoned his kitchen chores and set off, by a track over the hill to the village, to collect the letter. As he walked, his broad shoulders sagged and lines appeared on his face that might have made the fortune of an actor. His forehead was broad enough to indicate mental resourcefulness; his jaw was resolute without being heavy, his mouth firm but saved from hardness by lips that held the hint of a smile. These qualities, however, had not been brought out by circumstance. He had the eyes of a dreamer, at odds with actuality, hugging his own frustration.

On his way back from the village, he brightened, as if he would enjoy breaking the bad news to the others.

This trio did not quarrel openly. They would not accept the premise that they detested each other. Though they would snap and backbite occasionally, they avoided giving or taking serious offense. The result was that their association was sugared over with a false heartiness, itself an added exasperation.

Three weeks before, they had been invited to take a working holiday by going down to Renchester, moving in their files and plant as soon as building operations permitted. Living under the same roof was a daring experiment. But individual accommodations had been hard to find. And there was always the splendid isolation of fishing.

Besides the newspapers which Eddis had collected there were two letters and a book for Canvey — for Stranack a picture postcard of Ostend Casino, a glossy weekly, and the letter from Brengast Accessories Ltd.:

Re WillyBee Portable Air Conditioner
Dear Sir,

Your letter, 28th, ult., to which has been added the signatures of your colleagues, Messrs. Lyle Canvey and Rupert Eddis, has been considered by our Chairman, who suggests that you study the terms of your contract. Yours faithfully, K. Marchmont (Asst. Managing Director)

"It took us six hours to cook up our letter," said Canvey. He was a slender, wiry man with thick, sandy eyebrows. "WillyBee uses six lines."

"And he shoves the dirty work on Marchmont. WillyBee himself is skulking in Madrid — and a damn good thing for him!" growled Stranack, who was not normally aggressive, though he had a somewhat pugilistic appearance.

"It's a smack in the face for the team. WillyBee doesn't care if he loses us."

All three had flashed up the same idea. If the team amounted to so little, why should they burden themselves with its distasteful companionship?

"He can't lose us for four years. Do what our Chairman tells you and read your contract."

"Get your grandmother to read it

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and she'll tell you we're paid for routine, not for creative work."

"What about the 'special' we're doing now? I mean the pressure stove. If that does another fifty thousand —"

"WillyBee will pay us just what he's paid us for the air conditioner."

"The team must keep its temper with its kind employer."

"That letter amounts to contemptuous treatment. If we had any guts —"

They became statistical. Each, in turn, addressed the others as if they were the Board of Directors. No one listened. Each was convinced that the other two had bungled the letter requesting payment of a royalty for inventions worked out after official hours. Each guarded his tongue, aware of the danger.

Soon they began to contradict each other over trifles. A triangular brawl was looming when a siren sounded from the river.

"You're nearest, Lyle."

"What makes you think you have to tell me?" grunted Canvey.

As Canvey went out to operate the lock, the tension eased. Any two could get along better in the absence of the third.

"Have you noticed that Lyle always sticks up for WillyBee?"

"Only when I run him down."

"Surly sort of bloke! Means well, I expect."

"Here's *The Prattler!*" exclaimed Stranack, tearing the wrapping. "It's four weeks since they sent those chaps to interview WillyBee. It ought to be in this week, unless they've found out his name stinks. We're sure to be mentioned! 'First let me say that the success of the WillyBee Portable Air Conditioner is entirely due to —' Good lord, here he is — patting his own dear little autogiro! Two pages of it!"

Eddis looked over his shoulder.

"Who the girl? — cor, it's his wife! I didn't know men like WillyBee were allowed to marry. And anyway, she must be a misprint for his daughter!"

"She'd be a pin-up for the troops, but for all those clothes. He can buy her some more mink on our royalties."

It was the studio portrait of Veronica, which was so soon to grace the front pages. Eddis glanced at the text, found it unilluminating, and stood by the window, gloomily watching Canvey flood the lock. Stranack continued to gaze at the photograph of Veronica.

"There's something about those eyes that betokens experience," babbled Stranack. "Perhaps she is why WillyBee is like that — telling people to read their contracts!"

"We might get a lawyer to look at those contracts — perhaps there's a loophole."

"There won't be! The devil to WillyBee *and* his contracts *and* his pin-up!" Stranack sent *The Prattler* spinning across the room, to hit the wall and drop behind the sofa. "I'm going fishing."

The three were not together again until lunchtime. In solitude, their

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frustration had fanned their animus against Brengast and against each other. Yet each was determined not to be the first to start an open quarrel among themselves. A fantastic politeness descended upon them. Canvey praised the tinned potatoes which Eddis had served with the meat. Stranack apologized for monopolizing the salt. A stray breath could have blown away all the wrappings of decency, leaving only a consuming hatred.

The atmosphere remained unchanged until evening, when a suggestion from Eddis gave them unity.

"Why don't we run into Renchester and take away all the stuff we've piled up for the pressure stove?" he suggested. "It's our own — morally. If the stove is as good as we think it is, we could sell it to another company. On a royalty basis — full royalty!"

"Legally, WillyBee's got us tied up," warned Canvey. "There's no doubt that our salary —"

"Let him sue us! He'd funk the odium. If he had made even a measly offer, it would have been different. What about it?"

"I'm ready to chance it, if Arthur agrees," said Canvey.

"I do agree," said Stranack. "If we come unstuck, it'll still be worth it as a public protest. Let's get it done, or we shall be jawing about it all night. Right away! It's only nine — we could be back before midnight. Whose turn is it for lock duty tonight?"

"Jigger that!" cried Eddis. "This is a Big Occasion. Toss odd-man-out for keeping the lock."

The three men smacked their coins on the table.

Presently the two winners crossed the gangway over the lock gate, climbed the ramp, then crossed the road to a one-time cowshed, to emerge in an elderly Ford with a crumpled fender.

A quarter of a mile down the road, a rural district patrolman, Constable Huggins, saw the two men cross from the lock and enter the shed. The car had been backed onto the road, and driven off before he drew level. As the two men had a perfect right to use a car known to be their own, Constable Huggins was uninterested.

The next policeman to note the Ford with the crumpled fender was Recruit Constable Richards, patroling the eastern outskirts of Renchester. The Ford was parked in Welbeck Street, outside the new building of Brengast Accessories Ltd., looking faintly ridiculous beside a very large, very shiny Daimler. There was a light, he noticed, in a room on the second floor. He knew that the premises, not yet completed, were being occupied gradually and that no routine had yet been established. Besides, the Daimler guaranteed the propriety of whatever was going on.

He moved along the pavement, between the cars and the building, glanced into the yard, which con-

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tained a litter of building appliances. Propped against a cement mixer was a bicycle — a de luxe model, too, with aluminum frame — which he assumed to have been left behind by one of the builder's men. Within a dozen feet of the pavement, it was an invitation to a passing thief.

The trouble was, of course, that there were practically no thieves in Renchester — which, for all its size, was a dead end for an ambitious policeman. True, there had been a murder two years ago, but that didn't really count because the murderer had got clean away. Being a born optimist, Richards mentioned the aluminum bicycle to Constable Franks, who relieved him a few minutes later at 10 o'clock. And he made a little joke about the Ford and the Daimler.

Constable Franks did not find himself in Welbeck Street until half-past midnight. The aluminum bicycle had not yet been stolen. The Ford with the crumpled fender was still in the same position, but the Daimler was gone. There was no light in the building.

There, for the moment, the Ford rests; the Daimler, however, continued to be a factor. At nearly 1 o'clock a pair of yokel lovers, brought to Renchester police headquarters by the courtesy of a passing driver, told how the Daimler had caught their eye. They had been sitting, they said, on a stile 200 yards from the foot of Penbrook Hill, which is seven miles east of Renchester. The hill begins and ends with a short, steep gradient which would be almost unnegotiable in frosty weather if it were not sprinkled with sand — for which purpose a sand bin had been installed by the road, at the foot and at the summit.

The lovers were intrigued by the behavior of a large car which approached slowly and stopped by the sand bin at the foot of the hill. After some minutes they crept along the meadow and, through the hedge, observed two men — one holding a torch while the other picked the padlock of the sand bin. Having opened the lid, the men lifted from the car what appeared to be a dead body, which they put inside the sand bin, no doubt believing that it would lie there undiscovered until next winter. They could not identify the men, but judged them to be young by the swiftness of their movements. The men then closed the sand bin, adjusted the padlock, reversed the car, and drove back in the direction of Renchester. Before this, the lovers had seen that the car was a Daimler and had noted its number.

The night sergeant sent a patrol car to Penbrook Hill and learned by radio that the sand bin contained a dead body. Papers on the body indicated that his name was William Brengast.

In the murder of two years ago, rude things had been said about the failure of the county police to call Scotland Yard until it was too late. This time the Chief Constable was

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taking no risks. Even though the abandoned Daimler was found in a side street in Renchester, he decided that it was not a local crime.

By 8 o'clock, Detective-Inspector Curwen had arrived from the Yard, with his staff. The Chief Constable received him with magnificence. He placed an extensive suite of rooms in the town hall at Curwen's disposal, gave him the use of an almost unlimited number of cars, and said that he wished him luck — which was not quite true.

By this time reports had been turned in by the municipal and by the rural district police. The latter, per Constable Huggins of Peasebarrow, offered provisional identification of the Ford with the crumpled fender, and added so much information about the occupants of the lockhouse that Inspector Curwen even knew that one of the three men collected the mail daily at 11.

After giving appropriate orders, Curwen went to Brengast Accessories in Welbeck Street. The Chief Constable had cordoned off the whole premises, leaving Curwen virgin soil. Constable Richards — recalled to duty — indicated the room in which he had seen the light burning, the relative positions of Ford and Daimler, and was able to add that an aluminum bicycle had disappeared from the yard.

There was every indication that the room had been the scene of the murder. It was the office adjoining what was to be a laboratory and an experimental workshop. It was unfurnished except for a row of shelved lockers, two of which were open and empty. There were three packing cases, serviceable as chairs. The lid of a biscuit tin had been used as an ashtray. On the floor was a large wet patch, cleaner than the rest of the floor.

"They couldn't wash between the boards," said Curwen, and left his staff in charge while he made a tour of the building, keeping an eye open for the "blunt instrument" that had smashed the skull of William Brengast (the doctor had said) with a single blow. He need not have bothered. When he returned to the office he was shown an iron lever, three feet long, with a forked end, such as is used for opening packing cases.

"Standing up against the wall, sir — beside those lockers. Wiped clean with a wet rag."

"*Everything* has been wiped clean with a wet rag!" said another. "Not a fingerprint in the whole room — except on the gun, there. Handled only by deceased."

"Where did you find it?" It was a short, snubby revolver, which had not been fired.

"On the floor, sir — chalk mark behind that packing case."

Inspector Curwen turned, to gaze at a gap made by the removal of a floorboard.

"Blood, sir. I've taken a swab."

Curwen added the medical report to the known movements of the Ford and the Daimler.

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"One of those two men who were in the Ford hit him one when he drew that gun. Then one or both came back and cleaned up, after the sand bin act," he muttered. "Amateurs in a panic!" He turned to Detective-Sergeant Rouse. "Check that lever with the wound. I'm going back to the town hall."

The best room in the suite, which he had taken for himself, was an inspector's dream come true. The thickness of the carpet, for one thing; an impressive reference library, which included *Who's Who;* two electric wall-maps; a dictaphone; and an enormous desk with a number of shiny gadgets whose purpose he intended to explore. In an alcove sat Benjoy, his aide, using a noiseless typewriter. Benjoy was a pink young man, fresh from the training college; he stopped typing as his chief dropped into a padded swivel-chair.

"I'll dictate when you've finished what you're doing." There was a curve in the pad of the chair that rested the small of his back. "London has a lot to learn from these provincial towns."

"Yes, sir. A few small items have come in. Marchmont, Assistant Manager of Brengast Accessories, Ltd., thought deceased was in Madrid and has no information. He gave address of deceased's London flat. Miss Aspland, deceased's niece, spoke from the flat for Mrs. Brengast. The two ladies will be here at 3 this afternoon."

"Everybody lending a helping hand," intoned Curwen.

"Further to deceased's wife," continued Benjoy. "She arrived Diddington airport 8:18. Told the manager she had mistaken the time and said she intended to hire a car to take her to Renchester. No further news of Mrs. Brengast; no local road accident reported; no car was hired in Diddington at relevant time; garage hand reports that a young, well-dressed lady was offered a lift into Renchester by a traveler for Rondgarth Draperies."

"Wife dodging husband? No — not likely. I don't see a sex angle in this job — not with *two* killers. Ready for dictation?" He eyed the dictaphone with mistrust of himself. "I don't suppose you know how to manage these things, so I'll bawl it out as usual."

Curwen's preliminary report had the unfortunate effect of revealing that the three local constables on the beat — mainly by luck, of course — had done all the work. Little remained, he thought, but to tidy up the case for the lawyers, and go home. Why the Yard had been called in was the Chief Constable's secret.

Constable Lissett was hovering round the post office at Peasebarrow. In these parts it was easy enough to distinguish a visitor from the local inhabitants, especially one who was carrying three newspapers and half a dozen letters.

"Mr. Eddis?"

"No. My name is Stranack. Eddis is at the lockhouse."

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"Where you also are staying? Did you drive into Renchester last night, Mr. Stranack, leaving at about 9 o'clock?"

"Look here! What the devil is all this? Who are you?"

"I'm a police officer. Mr. Brengast, of Brengast Accessories, Ltd., was murdered in Renchester last night. Did you drive — ?"

"WillyBee murdered! Good lord! If he's been murdered he must be dead!" Stranack looked positively pleased about it.

"Were you in Renchester last night, Mr. Stranack?"

"No, I was on duty at the lockhouse. I say, this'll alter the shape of things. I must tell the others. We're all on his staff, you know. I'll take the track — you'll have to go round by the road — it's about three miles — "

"Wait, please! Can you produce any independent witnesses to confirm that you were at the lockhouse all night?"

The other's mouth hardened.

"I dunno! It depends what you mean by 'independent.' Let's see: between the present moment and 9 last night I've worked the lock four times. All regular customers." He gave the names of the companies and the approximate times. "Whether any of the bargees noticed me as a person — in the dark — I don't know. Sometimes we growl good night, or something, and sometimes we don't. The bargees aren't a matey crowd."

"Adds up to 'no,'" pronounced Lissett. "Did you have any visitors? Anyone dropping in, like?"

Lissett received a cautious, calculating stare.

"I'll stand pat on the bargees."

"Then I must ask you to get into the car and come with me to see the Inspector — of your own free will."

"Just a minute, Constable." Stranack stroked his chin. "If you'll be human, you may save a lot of false heroics. Am I under suspicion of murder?"

"When there's a murder, lots of innocent persons are asked to account for their movements." Lissett unbent a little. "My orders are that, if you have no independent witnesses —"

"That settles it." said Stranack. "I have an independent witness. There was a girl —"

Lissett produced a notebook.

"Her name and address, please?"

Again Stranack stroked his chin.

"I don't know that I care to go as far as that, at this stage. But I can tell you that she turned up after the others had gone and stayed until close to 3 in the morning."

"But you won't say who she is or where she is, so we can't check." Lissett opened the rear door of the car. "Will you come with me to headquarters, Mr. Stranack — voluntarily, you understand."

Stranack entered the car. "What, after all, is free will? Or would you rather give me your theory of the crime? Beginning, of course, with my motive for murdering the gentleman who pays the rent — or is it killing

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the goose that lays the golden eggs?"

"The Inspector'll know," said Lissett.

At the same time, to a minute or so, another police car was approaching the lock, just as one of the "regular customers" was passing through. Detective-Sergeant Rouse got out, leaving two colleagues in the car. He waited until the last barge had cleared and then accosted the temporary lockkeeper.

"Mr. Canvey?"

"No, I'm Eddis. Canvey is inside. I'll tell him."

"Don't bother. Mr. Eddis, did you drive into Renchester last night at about 9?" Before the other could protest, Rouse explained: "I am a police officer. Mr. Brengast was murdered in Renchester last night."

"Rot, my dear man!" laughed Eddis. "Mr. Brengast is in Madrid. I know, because the three of us here are on his staff, and we're counting the hours until he gets back. It's not affection — it's business. Whoever the corpse turns out to be, if he was murdered last night, you can cross me off. It was my spell on duty here — or rather, we tossed for it and I was odd-man-out."

Asked for witnesses, he gave the names of the "regular customers" and their approximate times. He thought it unlikely that any of the bargees would be able to distinguish him from the other two. He politely regretted that the detective had come all the way from Renchester for nothing.

"Did anyone drop in for a chat?"

"No. We know nobody in the neighborhood. And the natives regard us as 'foreigners'."

"No witnesses to confirm, Mr. Eddis. The Inspector will want to get this cleared up, so perhaps you wouldn't mind getting in the car."

"Really, I can't see the need for it — especially as I know it can't really be WillyBee — that is, Brengast."

"It's not usual for men of your education to obstruct the police."

"Dammit, I'm only registering a friendly protest! That your car? All right, then."

Eddis's assertion about Madrid — included, as it was, in Marchmont's information — weakened Rouse's confidence. He was less forthright when he tackled Canvey, whom he found in the sitting room, sorting a pile of file cards.

"I'm a police officer, Mr. Canvey, making routine inquiries. A man was murdered in Renchester last night. Did you — ?"

"Murdered?" Canvey smiled. "I'm afraid I can't help you. The only man I've ever wanted to murder is my boss — and he's in Madrid at the moment."

"Did you drive into Renchester last night?"

"No. I was looking after the lock."

"Oh, were you!" Rouse was startled. "You and Mr. Eddis, I suppose?"

"No. I was alone."

"I see," said Rouse untruthfully. "As a matter of routine, we have to check all statements. If you were

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alone here all night, you can't give us the name of anyone to confirm your statement?"

"I suppose not," agreed Canvey. "But there'll be witnesses that the lock was operated." He gave the details already given by Eddis.

"Didn't anyone drop in to see you during that time?"

"Not one of the locals has dropped in since we've been here."

Rouse was trying to add it up. Eddis said that Eddis was alone all night at the lock. Canvey said that Canvey was alone all night at the lock. These men were not halfwits. Therefore — ?

"Did your two friends leave here about 9 in the Ford?"

"I don't want to involve my friends, but I'm quite sure they can't have been mixed up with a murder. Yes, it must have been about 9. We'd had supper. We tossed for which of us should stay on guard, and I lost."

No change in the story.

But something else was sticking out.

"You say you tossed. Then you had some special purpose involving a trip to Renchester?"

Canvey explained that they were colleagues. "We're working on a special job. The records are at the new depot and we decided that we would break a rule of the firm by removing them and bringing them here. And here they are."

"What time did your two friends get back?"

"They made a night of it. I don't know what time they came back — I was asleep."

Five minutes later they were in the police car on the way to Renchester, Eddis next to the driver, Canvey and Rouse in the back. The third policeman had been left behind to take charge of the lock.

At police headquarters they made no objection to having their fingerprints taken. They were then asked to wait, each in a separate room, with the unconvincing assurance that the inspector would see them very soon. An hour passed and each was told that he could order lunch. They were still waiting at half-past 3 when Inspector Curwen called on Mrs. Brengast at *The Red Lion*. . . .

Murdered Industrialist's Mystery Flight.
Wife Arrives Too Late. Airport Official's Statement.
Wife's Mystery Hitch-Hike.

That sort of thing would upset Veronica's nerve, Jill Aspland had reflected that morning, as the train from London gathered speed. She sat on the newspapers she was not actually reading.

Jill was twenty-four, daughter of William Brengast's only sister and sole relation, with whom he had quarreled. When his sister and her husband were killed in an air crash, Brengast was conscience-stricken and anxious to "do something" for Jill — which was not easy. Her course was already set. She took a business B.Sc.

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and tactfully landed a good job before Brengast could press her to take one in his company. Secretly he had thought her a fool to go into business, because she could so easily marry well. Like most of his kind he assessed women on their physical appearance — thereby substantially underestimating his niece. He would have described her as a middle-size lightweight, well sprung, with a superb finish. Being her uncle, he noted objectively that dark hair and violet eyes looked just right with a fair skin and a mouth that knew what it was talking about.

By the time the dining-car attendant called them for lunch, Jill had mastered the contents. The reports in the early evening papers ended at 7 o'clock in the morning — before Peasebarrow Lock had become a focal point. Jill toned it all down to a broad outline.

Veronica listened without close attention. She was ashamed of herself for not being grief-stricken. She could feel only a sense of freedom in the fact that her husband was dead. Looming in the shadows was that dreadful phrase, *dum sola et casta.*

She looked across the table at Jill in sudden recognition that the £100,000 would go to Jill, if the marriage settlement were voided. Her husband had told her that Jill would be his residuary legatee. *Jill will be rich and I shall be penniless,* she thought; *and Jill will be unbearably sweet and generous, and offer me a dole out of my own money. I'd rather die!*

"Shall I run through it again?" offered Jill.

"I couldn't bear it, darling. I shall just tell the police what they want to know about WillyBee and put all the horrid details out of my mind."

So poor Veronica had already promised herself that everybody would be charming and considerate and shield her from all unpleasantness. Jill had to admit that she had already signed on as a cushion for Veronica. Why? She was fond of Veronica but did not esteem her, nor envy her the sheltered life. She had learned through her business contacts that a rich husband may create as many problems as he solves. It would be very nice for a month every year, perhaps.

At Renchester, Jill booked a suite in *The Red Lion* while Veronica waited in the taxi. Jill helped her unpack. In the rush to catch the train, the suitcase with which Veronica had arrived at the flat from Salisbury was brought along unopened. There was a second one, hastily packed with garments more suited to sudden bereavement.

"You won't be wearing this woollen crepe," said Jill.

That wretched coat! Veronica had come up from Salisbury in a tailor-made, the woollen crepe packed in the suitcase.

"I forgot it was in the suitcase. Of course you're right — it's quite unsuitable now."

She took the coat from Jill and hung it at the back of the wardrobe.

Word was brought that Detective-

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Inspector Curwen was asking to see Mrs. Brengast.

"Show him into our sitting room, please," ordered Jill. She found a dark scarf and draped it on Veronica's shoulders. "Don't touch your make-up — it's just right. You've taken off your wedding ring — remember to put it on again. Come along as soon as you're ready."

Curwen and Jill made the right impression on each other. He was large, rotund, and homely, looking like a prosperous businessman who is bullied by his daughters. Curwen saw a very personable young woman with a clear eye who would come to the point directly and without shillyshallying. He introduced Benjoy, whom Jill thought very young and pink for a policeman.

The old coaching inn had been taken over by a company and turned into a modern hotel of 50 bedrooms. The furniture was a superior grade of mass-produced — one settee, two armchairs, four uprights, a table, and a telephone — efficient but characterless.

When Veronica came in, she made an entrance of it, to Jill's annoyance. There was too much fumbling with the door handle, and the pained smile was overdone. It was the wrong kind of room and the wrong kind of audience. Veronica, when you faced up to it, was a stupid woman. Curwen mumbled condolences. Jill shuffled everybody into chairs, placing Veronica alone on the settee.

"I understand, Mrs. Brengast, that no one but yourself knew that Mr. Brengast was not in Madrid?"

"And even I didn't know otherwise until yesterday morning, when I received this airmail letter from Ireland, asking me to meet him at Diddington. I thought it said 9, but it really says 6."

Curwen read the letter and obtained permission to keep it.

"So you arrived there more than two hours after your husband had left?"

"Yes, and there was no car available, but a man who heard me inquiring kindly offered me a lift."

"A lift to Renchester?"

"Yes. He dropped me at the Renchester station. I caught the 10:13 to Wheatley Junction, arriving 10:43 — and the 10:50 on to Salisbury, arriving 12:03. I have a sister at Salisbury — a Mrs. Kortland — and I spent the night with her."

Never before had Jill heard so precise a statement from Veronica. No rambling, no irrelevancies. Veronica was watching Curwen. She had given him the tale she had worked out with a railway timetable. The owner of the Morris would hardly be likely to butt in and admit that his behavior had compelled her to get out of his car.

"But your purpose was to join your husband, was it not?"

"It was, to start with. But I couldn't. I didn't know where he was staying. The letter didn't say."

Curwen was silent. He observed that Mrs. Brengast was not wearing her wedding ring.

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"His coming back suddenly like that upset my arrangements," continued Veronica. "I had to be in London next — *this* — morning to welcome Miss Aspland, whom I had invited to stay. And now this has spoiled her holiday."

"That's all quite clear," said Curwen. "I need not trouble you any further." The coroner's officer, he decided, could be left to tell her that she must formally identify the body. "Oh, yes, there's just one more question. Is there anyone — besides yourself, of course — who would benefit by your husband's death?"

"I'd not benefit — he has provided for me with a settlement."

"He told me — often — that he intended to leave me money," cut in Jill. "But I never knew whether he really meant it."

"I'm sure I hope he did, Miss Aspland," said Curwen, as he and Benjoy bowed themselves out.

"The sort of woman you never know whether she's pretending to be a fool or just can't help it!" remarked Curwen, largely to himself.

"I was watching Miss Aspland," offered Benjoy. "I don't think she believed the tale about the trains."

"Ah, she's the right sort! You'd know at once when she was telling lies — which she wouldn't be," said Curwen. "Anyway, Mrs. Brengast isn't going to be much use to us. The girl who was at the lockhouse is the one we want. Did anything more come in about her?"

"Yes, sir. It'll be in your basket. Voluntary statement by George Bence, driver at the Hollow Tree all-night garage, Renchester. He collected a woman at Peasebarrow lock at about 2:50 and took her to Wheatley Junction. She paid him a two quid fare and a quid tip. Sergeant Rouse sent Lissett to get a description of the girl. Bence said there was no one with her when he picked her up, but he thought she was a respectable woman — suitcase and good clothes and what he called lah-di-dah. He blabbed to the reporters, so it'll be in the next editions."

In Curwen's room, Rouse was waiting.

"Deceased's widow!" exclaimed Curwen, drawing a deep breath. "I don't think there's anything there, but we'll have her movements checked from the airport to Renchester station where she says she caught the 10:13 to Wheatley and the next one on to Salisbury. She's a good-looking woman, so it ought to be easy." He gave a police description which might have applied to the veriest hag. "Nothing fresh in my basket about those three men from the lock?"

"It's being typed, sir. We've made contact with the transport companies and their men. The times given are about right, but the bargees haven't been through that lock in daylight for two months and they can't identify. They knew there were some town fellers on the lock and that's all."

"And what about the lockhouse?"

"Been right through it, sir. The girl left no dabs — only a couple of

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bits of that face tissue — they call it — stuff they carry in their purse to wipe their faces when someone's messed their make-up for 'em. Maybe she had a drink, but that's inconclusive."

"In-con-clu-*sive!*" snorted Curwen. "What's it mean?"

"Meaning they've got a very good stock of liquor — very good indeed! — rum, whiskey, gin — and empties of all except gin. One bottle of gin looked as if it had only lost one fairly stiff 'un, and a bottle of orange juice ditto. I had 'em dusted, and up came clear prints on both. Stranack's!"

"He's the one that offered the girl without name or address, isn't he?"

"Yes, sir. And he's called in a lawyer."

"Wise guy! I'll see the other two first — one by one, of course. Have they tried to talk to each other?"

"No, sir." He gave details. "No trouble from any of 'em."

"The gentlemanly touch!" ejaculated Curwen. "Don't be misled by the B.A., B.Sc., and the college accent. They're ratting on each other like half-baked crooks, and it'll be the high jump for all three. Pinching each other's alibi — that's been done before, too!"

"But one of 'em is telling the truth."

"That won't help him. They conspired to murder and agreed that one of them must stay behind to keep the lock. After the job was done, the other two lost their nerve, and each thought he'd rather be the one who stayed at home."

When Canvey was brought in, he looked anxious and preoccupied — not that this had any effect on Curwen. Innocent and guilty alike tend to adopt a manner when involved with the police.

Curwen indicated a chair and opened with general questions about the other's profession and the tenancy of the lockkeeper's house. He learned that Canvey was a mineralogist, Stranack a chemist, and Eddis a mechanical engineer.

"And so you all three moved in for six weeks." Curwen was now ready to start. Benjoy had his pencil poised. "Which of you owns that Ford?"

"It belongs to the company. When it got too shabby for the travelers, we put in for it, as a team."

"Which of you drove it last night?"

"Eddis."

"You told my officer you were not in the car. How do you know Eddis —"

"Because Stranack can't drive. I say, Inspector, is this going to be a cross-examination?"

"That's up to you. What time did the others come back?"

"I don't know. I sleep heavily."

Curwen glanced at Rouse's report.

"Your last customer was at 2:45 ack emma, the Thames Transport Company. You operated the lock?" When Canvey nodded, the Inspector quickly went on: "Then how d'you know the other two were not already in bed?"

"Because I did not go to bed until about twenty minutes after letting the Thames people through."

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"What would you say, Mr. Canvey, if I were to tell you that Mr. Stranack says that it was *he* who operated the lock at that time?"

Canvey gaped at the Inspector. His face, his whole body registered profound astonishment. Curwen let him take his time.

"If Stranack said he was with me, I've already dished him without knowing it, because I've explained to you — in some detail — that I was alone."

"He didn't say that. He said he was there *alone* — by inference, that you and Eddis had taken the Ford into Renchester."

"Frankly, that's incredible!" Then Canvey relaxed. "He'd know that Eddis would be bound to give him away, wouldn't he?" There was no response. "You're not telling me that Eddis backed him up?"

"You're the one that's answering the questions, Mr. Canvey."

"Perhaps it's not so incredible after all," muttered Canvey. "Why did they concoct that tale? Because they murdered Brengast."

Curwen smiled to himself. So far, it was running to form — each accusing the others.

"This changes my attitude, Inspector. There was no moon and I don't suppose those bargees recognized me as an individual. It puts me in peril of being charged." He hesitated, then continued, "I wish to withdraw an item of my statement to your officer this morning."

"Thought better of it, eh?"

"Thought worse of it! He asked me whether anyone had dropped in and I said 'no'."

"So you give one tale to start with and now that things are hotting up a bit, you're going to offer another?"

"Tale be damned!" snapped Canvey. "Your man told me he was making *routine* inquiries about the murder of a man whose name I didn't know until I heard one of your men shouting it in the corridor here. I believed I could give the police no information and that I could not be personally concerned. Therefore, I suppressed the fact that there was a girl with me."

Another one claiming that girl! Perhaps someone had shouted in the corridor about the girl, too! Still, one of them *had* stayed at the lock, and it might as easily have been this man as Stranack.

"Looks as if we're getting somewhere, Mr. Canvey. As you've gone that far, you might as well give me her name and address."

"I don't know it."

The inspector smiled broadly.

"If you think I'm inventing her, Inspector, I suggest that you try the half-dozen all-night garages here. One of them received a call from Peasebarrow lock between 2 and 3 in the morning to pick up a lady — whom they duly picked up."

"I'll accept that such a call was made. It proves a girl was at the lock. But it doesn't prove *you* were with her. Can you describe her?"

"Not my strong suit, but I'll try.

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Under thirty. Blonde — very fine head and features. Face round to oval — not classical model — her nose is not completely straight, seen in profile."

The description, thought Curwen, would fit large groups of women — it evoked no picture in his mind except that of Mrs. Brengast.

"A plain coat and skirt, one-piece, summery frock affair, but expensive material, and a yellow coat ditto," continued Canvey. "Hat — one of those small ones — light-straw, I suppose, with roses. Had a suitcase — air-travel type."

Curwen had turned to the garage driver's report. *No hat. Scarf tied under chin. No one with her.*

"Was she wearing the hat when she left you?"

"Yes. The roses picked up any light there was. I noticed them when a lorry went by just as she was about to leave."

"You carried the suitcase and put her into the car, I suppose?"

"No. I offered to, but she refused. She went over alone and waited."

"And you turned back and went to bed?"

"As a matter of fact I watched the road until the car turned up. A bicyclist came along while she was crossing — bikes are rare in those parts. His light probably picked her out, and I waited in case he turned back to try something. I stood outside the house until the car had taken her off."

Wrong about the hat, right about the suitcase and the girl waiting on the road alone. Curwen sat on the fence.

"I don't suppose that'll help much. But when the facts have been published she will come forward of her own accord — I'm confident she will."

"You don't sound very confident."

"I was thinking — it wouldn't do her reputation any good. But — dammit! — she wouldn't be quiet and let me be hanged — if that is your amiable intention, Inspector."

"There's nothing personal about it, Mr. Canvey. Y'see, I'm not allowed to believe anything until I've checked it."

"I can give you nothing checkable about the girl. She had a drink — one. And before she left I scrabbled up a supper of sorts. A full account would only be like those letters read out in breach of promise cases — stuff that might have been said or written by thousands of couples. Stranack's tale about a girl — which would be imaginary — would be indistinguishable from mine — which would be true."

"All the same, if I were you, I'd write a detailed log of everything that happened. Maybe something checkable will drop out. There's one more question about her — why did you rub out all her fingerprints?"

"I did no such thing!" cried Canvey. "Your men should try again. They couldn't have been rubbed out unless the others did the rubbing."

"Leaving the girl out, for a moment, let's see if I can help you. Do

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you sign any papers or anything when the boats go through the lock?"

"Nominally, we do. There's a journal and we're supposed to enter the names and times of the regular customers — and there aren't any others. In this case, I ought to have. But I didn't."

"Unlucky for you, eh?"

"Very! We often make the entries en bloc — it might be a few days at a time. It's a farce, anyway."

"Very well, Mr. Canvey. If you think of anything I can check, send me word at once."

Benjoy had escorted Canvey from the room before the latter realized he was being detained on suspicion.

"Two of 'em claiming the same girl, eh!" remarked Curwen genially, when Benjoy returned. "One of 'em knows he's lying. When we find the girl, she will expose him. He knows that, too. Can you pin any sense to it?"

"Only if the one who's lying knows we can never find the girl."

"But he hasn't had time to bump her off. And now that we've got him, it's too late for that. If you figure it out, the third man — Eddis — ought to claim the girl as well. Go and fetch him and we'll see."

Eddis adopted a manner of jaunty defiance. Curwen again took no notice, apologized politely for keeping him waiting so long.

"That's all right, Inspector. I know the sort of thing you're up against. I've been caught up in a murder before."

Curwen let that pass as a flourish. He asked the same opening questions, receiving substantially the same answers, meantime glancing at the original reports on the three men. Canvey had said that he had wanted to murder his boss. Canvey would have insisted that it was a joke.

"I think, Mr. Eddis, that you three men had a grievance against your chief?"

Eddis was startled but made a good recovery.

"The last kind of question I expected! Yes, we had a grievance, but hardly of murderous proportions. We thought he had treated us shabbily." He gave details of the £50,000 sale of air conditioners, their determination to recover their papers, which had been the object of the journey to Renchester. "We tossed odd-man-out for the job and I lost. That's why I stayed behind and kept the lock."

Now we're off, thought Curwen, and recited the same formula.

"Your colleague, Stranack, asserts that he spent the night at the lock — alone — and that you and Canvey went into Renchester."

"Bet your life he did!" Eddis laughed. "Sorry, Inspector, I mean if he did say it, you've got Canvey here. Why not ask him before we get on with the third degree?" The jauntiness thinned out as Curwen made no answer. "Canvey didn't tell you *I* was in the car! What good would it do him to change the names, as he's in the soup himself either way? *Did* Canvey back him up?" Under Cur-

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wen's protracted silence, Eddis's nerve faltered. "He did! I can see it in your face. Those two have always hated me. I was sure of it. And here's a foul, poisoned stab in the back, if I ever saw one!"

"Better keep cool," advised Curwen. "Suppose I believe you and not them? I only say 'suppose,' mind! They're both trying to put you on the spot. O-kay! Here's Scotland Yard offering to give you its help to smash their tales. Leave out the hate stuff, and begin there. Tell me something that happened when you were alone in that house — something I can check — which they couldn't know about."

For a minute Eddis was silent.

"This is where the trap shuts with a bang. I can tell everything I did until I went to bed. And the only things you can check are the things Stranack can say he did — without having been there. Operate the lock. That's the beginning and the end of the whole tale, because it's the only item you can check."

"Better leave it to me to decide what we can check. You told our officer this morning that no one dropped in. We won't hold you to that statement, if you would like to change it?"

"No one came to visit me at the lockhouse," said Eddis stolidly.

Curwen had not expected this. It was conveniently definite. He changed tactics.

"I put it to you, Mr. Eddis, that you were visited by a girl?"

"No!" It was nearly a shout.

"Then listen to this. We have proof that a telephone call was made between 2 and 3 in the morning, from the instrument in Peasebarrow lockhouse, in a woman's voice. The call was for car hire. The car duly turned up and took off the girl."

"No comment," said Eddis sullenly.

"Eh?" Curwen blinked. "That's a funny sort of answer!" Receiving no response, he continued, "What's the use, Mr. Eddis? You won't suggest that the girl slipped into the lockhouse while you were working the lock — and out again — without your knowing a thing about it. And that you didn't hear a car stop, turn, and start again within a hundred yards of the lock?"

"I offer you no suggestion at all about a girl or anything to do with a girl."

"You do realize that I'm trying not to charge you with murder, don't you?"

"I hope you won't charge me, of course," sighed Eddis. "But I won't be particularly afraid of being hanged if you do. They simply can't get away with the tale that one of them was there and I was in Renchester. They'll be bound to crack under cross-examination — there must be lots of little things they can't dovetail. Only, I can't think of any of them right now."

Curwen had to admit to himself that he was impressed. But being impressed is not accepted by the higher authorities in lieu of evidence.

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Curwen took him through the times at which the customers passed through the lock.

"Did you enter these in the log?"

"Yes."

"That's the sort of evidence I want, Mr. Eddis." He passed a sheet of paper and a pen. "Will you just repeat the entry you made and add your signature."

"I'll sign the note with initials as I did in the book," he said, taking the pen. "And I'll put a ring round my full signature."

As he returned the pen, Eddis exclaimed, "Little things! I've just thought of something. Shortly before I went to bed, I saw a big covered lorry coming along the road towards Renchester. A tobacco lorry which I've seen before. Light covering with a trademark of a cowboy smoking a pipe. Flood-lit. Ah, I've got it! Brendon Shag Tobacco. That'd be about 2:45."

"They're pretty common on the road at night."

"But bicyclists are not common on that road. It's too far between the towns for any but Peasebarrow people. The cyclist I saw was not a local, because he kept straight on past the track that leads to the village — Renchester being behind him. He was riding unevenly, as if he were fairly tight. I bet the tobacco driver spotted that cyclist, say a mile Renchesterwards of the lock. I can't swear to the time, but it'd be before 3 o'clock."

"We might be able to check that."

"I'll think of some more things like that. Half a dozen or so ought to do the trick. It's a matter of concentration. And I suppose I'll have to concentrate in custody."

"I'm afraid so, for the present."

Curwen was making his own notes when Benjoy returned.

"You've got a fresh mind, boy. Which of those two is the liar?"

"Insufficient evidence, sir. The logbook entry is negative. The chap who stayed at home might have forgotten, as Canvey said he forgot. The catch is that they both mention a lorry and a bicycle passing. At about the same time, too — though Canvey supplies a girl and Eddis doesn't."

"We can check that lorry — Brendon Shag. And maybe the cyclist."

"And if the lorry and the cyclist *did* pass at that time, sir — how is it that two men saw them *when only one was there?*"

"I dunno!" said Curwen cheerfully. "We'll ask 'em to tell us after we've checked. What about that girl? I tell Eddis that I know a girl was there and he says, 'No comment.' That's a posh way of telling me I'm a liar. Did you get a B.A. before you joined the Force?"

"No, sir. I suggest he may not have meant that you were lying."

"No *comment!*" repeated Curwen. "I was only asking him to say 'yes' or 'no.'"

"It might have meant that he admitted the girl was there, but that he refused to sacrifice her reputation to get himself out of a hole."

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"Cor!" Curwen gaped, then shut his mouth and chuckled. "Fancy me not thinking of that! Took the missus to the pictures a while ago. Lovely girl turns to the judge and says, 'He Was In My Arms,' she says. The missus cried. But in the end it turned out he wasn't — and that's what I think. I sprang the girl on Eddis — first he'd heard of her — and he stalled for time. And now we'll hear what Stranack thinks he can get away with — lawyer and all!"

Curwen's first impression of the solicitor was that Stranack must have picked him blindly out of the directory. Mr. Higstock was a spare, elderly man in a rusty black suit and a starched wing collar that was too large for him. He looked as if he were more accustomed to advising farmers than criminals — probably a survival from the days when Renchester was a small market town. He bowed when Curwen offered him a chair.

Curwen trotted out the same general questions to Stranack, expecting interruptions from the lawyer, but getting none. The questions about Stranack's relations with the deceased were very near the knuckle, being likely to incriminate him on the point of motive.

"Is there anything in your statement to Detective-Constable Lissett, Mr. Stranack, that you would now wish to withdraw?" the Inspector asked, thinking he would give the solicitor a chance to earn his fee.

"Nothing," answered Stranack.

"You told Lissett that you were in charge of the lock last night at the relevant time — namely from 9 until 3 in the morning. Are you aware that Eddis and Canvey deny this?"

"No, I'm certainly not! There must be a mistake somewhere. We tossed —"

"Each states that he took charge of the lock while you went in the Ford with the other."

"One moment, please, Inspector," said Mr. Higstock apologetically. "Mr. Stranack, you did not warn me of this embarrassing possibility."

"Because I didn't know it!" cried Stranack. "I'm trying hard to believe they said it, but I can't."

"We may take it that the Inspector is not joking," said Mr. Higstock. "I must confess that this completely upsets our defense, Mr. Stranack. Unless, of course, we can produce independent proof of your statement. Can we?"

Curwen was almost sorry for Mr. Higstock's client. Stranack was offering the bargees. When Curwen had disposed of this, Mr. Higstock again intervened.

"I don't know whether you feel inclined to answer a question of mine, Inspector? You will realize that I am at a disadvantage — you have sprung a veritable bombshell on us. Did the other two gentlemen also claim to have enjoyed the society of a lady?"

"A girl was mentioned," conceded Curwen. "But I don't see how it's going to help your client to claim her, if he doesn't know her name or address — as he told our man this morning."

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"What I said was that I was *unwilling* to give her name and address. I still don't think it's necessary."

"Then let's have a description," said Curwen.

Stranack hesitated, then plunged in.

"I'm a raw novice at this game, but here goes: she was good-looking. You can multiply that. Blonde. She's not frightfully tall and I don't suppose she's short, or I'd have noticed. Long eyelashes. Large eyes — dunno what color. Nose straight, I suppose, except for a tiny bit at the end, which hardly counts. Altogether, it's what people call a soulful face, except for an expression that points to the other thing. Very expensively got up. I don't suppose all this is the least use."

None at all, thought Curwen. But again he found himself visualizing Mrs. Brengast. Probably because she was the last good-looking woman he had seen — not counting Miss Aspland.

"How did she come to the lock?"

"I don't know. As far as I'm concerned, she just appeared out of nowhere. Complete with suitcase."

"Did she tell you why she was walking along that lonely road at nightfall?"

"Did I ask her the sort of questions a policeman would ask? I did not! I didn't care where she came from, nor why. She doesn't know I know her name. And I don't suppose she knows mine."

"You say she was expensively got up. Evening dress?"

"No. One-piece dress, yellowish coat over it, the usual thing, only better. Hat — straw, small, with flowers all round."

"What time did she leave you?"

"Shortly before 3 — in a car hired from the Hollow Tree."

"Was she wearing the hat when you put her into the car?"

"She was wearing the hat, but I didn't put her into the car. She asked me not to. I say! Can't we leave her and go on to something else?"

Even Curwen was startled until Stranack added: "She won't leave me in the lurch. If this wretched business is already in the papers, she's probably on her way here."

"Indeed, I hope so," said Mr. Higstock. "But I must remark that a woman who stays until 3 o'clock in the morning alone in a house with a young man whom she has never met before is unlikely to be burdened with a civic conscience."

"You've got it all wrong!" Stranack turned angrily to his solicitor. "She's very well off. She's what your generation called a 'lady'!"

"We'll concede the girl was there," said Curwen. "Now tell us something to show you were there with her."

"How can I? We sat out in deck chairs for a bit and had a drink. She had gin and orange — I had rum. Then we went into the house and — well! — eventually we had supper — soup, chicken, and new potatoes, peaches — all tinned. Oh! — I've thought of something. She dropped a hint that it would be pretty disas-

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trous for her if our little secret became known. So when she had gone I used a wet rag on anything I thought she might have touched. If your men found any of her fingerprints, it's my fault!"

"She told you it'd be disastrous for her and yet you think she'll show up?"

"She'll have to, now that I'm in the hands of the police. If she doesn't, I shall drag her in."

"All right!" snapped Curwen. "In the meantime I'd advise you to write a full account, giving as many details as you can. Until she clears you, we shall have to keep you in custody on suspicion."

Mr. Higstock gave a nervous cough.

"Excuse me, Inspector," he said. "May I ask? What are the grounds for suspicion?"

"They're as solid as we like them, Mr. Higstock. As you've no doubt had considerable experience of the criminal law, I think you'll agree with me." He felt that the last was perhaps an unfair blow, so he relaxed. "Here's the set-up. These three men had a grievance against deceased, their employer, for harshly, as they believe, withholding monies to which they believed themselves to be entitled. The other directors support the young men's claim, so that if deceased were *deceased*, they would all three benefit by what I understand would be a considerable sum of money. Before 9 o'clock last night — note that I said *before*, Mr. Higstock — these three put their heads together and decided that they would wrongfully remove certain papers from the premises of the company. Their Ford car was seen to leave its garage and proceed in the direction of Renchester at approximately nine. There were two men in the Ford. The subsequent movements of that Ford — linked with those of deceased's Daimler — create a very strong *prima facie* case that the two men in it killed Mr. Brengast and attempted to conceal the body in a roadside sand bin. Before setting out to get those papers, they tossed as to which should stay and keep the lock. Your client says he was the odd-man-out. Eddis says Eddis was. Canvey says Canvey was. Two of them are lying. We don't care tuppence which. If there's no rebutting evidence forthcoming they may be charged with conspiracy."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Higstock. "The facts are not in dispute. But you said 'conspiracy.' Conspiracy to do what?"

"Conspiracy to murder Brengast, of course!"

"*Untenable!*"

The word was rapped out with a sharpness that made Curwen jump. If a turtle dove had snarled and bitten him savagely he would hardly have been more surprised.

Mr. Higstock was occupied with his client.

"Mr. Stranack, I advise you to submit to arrest under protest and leave the Inspector and myself to discuss the matter. If we fail to agree, I shall

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apply at once for a writ of *habeas corpus* and you may rest assured that my application will be successful."

"Good enough, Mr. Higstock! Inspector, I submit to arrest under protest."

"I wished to get rid of my client," simpered Higstock, as the door closed behind Benjoy and Stranack, "because it is necessary to admit to you that he may — or may not — be a liar. That does not affect the matter of conspiracy to murder."

Mr. Higstock waited until Curwen had lowered his eyebrows.

"Before a charge of conspiracy to murder will lie, you have to establish that the conspirators at least believed that it would be possible to commit the murder. I have evidence — and no doubt you have, too — that these three young men did not, before 9 o'clock, believe it possible to set out in that Ford and murder Mr. Brengast, for the simple reason that they believed him to be in Madrid. I have ascertained that no one knew that deceased was paying a literally flying visit to England, except the deceased's wife. Prove that they were in touch with Mrs. Brengast before 9 o'clock, and you have your conspiracy. Not otherwise!"

"Half a minute, Mr. Higstock! I am relying on the movements of the Ford and the lies of the suspects."

"Irrelevant to the charge of conspiracy!" pronounced Mr. Higstock. "You have evidence that the lock was operated. You have no evidence that a fourth man was employed for that task. You are therefore obliged to accept their statement that the lock was operated by one of them."

"But what has the lock got to do with the murder?" demanded Curwen.

"Oh, nothing — nothing whatever! That is my point! But it has a very great deal to do with whom you arrest. For instance, if you arrest all three, you will know for certain that you are arresting one wholly innocent man. You have, at present, no means of denying the statement of any one of them that he is the innocent man."

Curwen grunted. Mr. Higstock thanked him profusely for the courteous forbearance shown to his client and himself.

"Don't think me unappreciative of your difficulties, Inspector. It must be very disturbing for you. You are accustomed to searching for the guilty. In this case, you already have both guilty men under lock and key." Mr. Higstock bowed himself to the door, where he turned.

"But — strictly between ourselves, Inspector — you will have to unlock those doors. You will have to let the guilty men go free until you have found the *innocent* man!"

Having dropped what he would doubtless have called a "veritable bombshell," Mr. Higstock stole away.

Curwen caught Benjoy's eye and grimaced.

"Very well put, if you ask me! *Find the innocent man!* That's a new one on me."

(*continued on page 122*)

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WINNER OF A THIRD PRIZE

JOHN J. MALONE

Sure and it's a lucky issue of EQMM that can bring you a brand-new story about one of detectivedom's most delightful duos — schoolteacher sleuthess, the incomparable Hildegarde Withers, and dipsodetective, the unquenchable John J. Malone. There is only one word for it (even if we have to coin it here and now) — a madcapper . . . This year Stuart Palmer was elected President of the Mystery Writers of America, Inc., a great honor to a grand fellow. Former presidents of MWA include Baynard Kendrick, Ellery Queen, Hugh Pentecost, Lawrence G. Blochman, John Dickson Carr, Helen McCloy, Anthony Boucher, George Harmon Coxe, Helen Reilly — an Honor Roll, one might almost say, of EQMM contributors . . . (Dear Helen Reilly: Please send us a story — and make it unanimous!)

MISS WITHERS

AUTOPSY AND EVA

by STUART PALMER and CRAIG RICE

DON'T ANSWER IT — MAYBE THEY'LL go away," called out John J. Malone hopefully as the buzzer sounded from the other room. But the bulging blonde in the wispy chartreuse dinner gown had already started to open the door; obediently she tried to shut it again but found it blocked by a stout sensible oxford.

"No matter how busy he is," said the angular female who was now pushing her way into the hotel suite, "Mr. Malone will see *me!*" Then she caught sight of the stocky little lawyer who was just emerging from the bedroom, dressed to the teeth in a new gray-green Finchley suit and at the moment engaged in getting a perfect knot in a flaming Sulka tie already tinged with cigar ash. "Ah, there you are!" cried Miss Hildegarde Withers.

Malone winced, and then managed a warmish smile. "Hildegarde, I honestly did intend to give you a ring the minute I got into L. A., but I've been tied up with so many things —"

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"So I see," remarked the schoolteacher, with a sideways glance.

"Sugar, wait for me in the cocktail lounge downstairs, will you?" Malone asked quickly. The blonde pouted, then grabbed up her wrap and bag, and flounced out, not quite slamming the door. "My secretary," he explained hopefully.

"Goodness, how our dear Maggie has *changed*. I'd *never* have recognized her."

"You know it's not Maggie —"

"Yes, I know," interrupted the schoolteacher crisply. "Because I talked to Maggie yesterday in Chicago via long distance, which is how I found out where you were to be located. You were planning to leave for Honolulu tomorrow?"

"I was," Malone admitted. "I mean, I am. I just collected a fat fee and I'm on my first vacation in years and tonight I'm dancing at Mocambo where the movie stars go —"

"Correction," Hildegarde interrupted firmly. "You are staying here with *me* this evening, because I'm afraid we're thoroughly mixed up in another murder case."

The little lawyer stiffened. "*We* are? Holy Saint Paul and Minneapolis, not again!" Automatically he reached for solace in the form of a bottle and a glass.

"Try Antabuse sometime," suggested Miss Withers tartly. "And go easy on that nasty stuff; tonight, unless I miss my guess, you'll need all your wits about you."

"Tonight I need a blonde about me," Malone protested. "Can't this thing wait?"

"The man — I should say men — who are coming here can't wait. The first should arrive within the hour."

"But my dear lady, why?" Twice within the past year or so the little lawyer had been mixed up with Miss Withers on homicide cases, to the detriment of his nerves — and there hadn't been a fee in either. Enough, he thought, was enough.

"Why are they coming here? Willy-nilly to fall into my trap and give us information about the Ryan murder." She peered at him. "You read about it, of course? It happened last Saturday in a big apartment house out on Wilshire Boulevard. An Army colonel just home from Korea was found in his wife's bedroom with a bullet through his head."

Malone stared glumly at the bottom of his glass. "Yes, I read something about it in the papers back home. A sordid story. Returning hero covered with medals comes rushing back on leave, panting for the arms of his beautiful wife whom he hasn't seen in years. He unlocks the door of his apartment and finds the girl *in flagrante* with her boy friend. There is a fracas, but somehow they overpower him, then take his service pistol and shoot him dead as Kelsey. After which they get panicky and make a run for it, but the police will pick them up soon enough. It's not a case I'd care to try in court — no chance for a valid self-defense plea. Because it was the victim's own gun there might be a

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possibility, with luck, of cutting it to second-degree homicide, but public opinion would be so strong —"

"This time public opinion, like yours, is almost 100 per cent wrong," Miss Withers said, advancing on him with a bony forefinger wagging. "Lieutenant-Colonel Ryan was no hero, he was only in Korea on a safe staff assignment for a few months, and most of his time in the Pacific — which dates from just before the fall of Japan — was spent in the Judge Advocate General's office in Tokyo, in charge of the sequestered assets of the Japanese government. The only medal he ever got — according to my informant in the Pentagon, a Major who learned geography at my knee years ago — was the Legion of Merit, which I understand desk officers award to one another for not forgetting to lock up the files when they leave the office at 5. Nor was Ryan exactly rushing home to the arms of his wife; the record shows that he landed at March Field some 36 hours before he showed up at the apartment."

"Yes," said Malone, interested. "But who else would have any motive?"

"Just like a man! And I can't believe that a girl like Eva Ryan, only 26 and from an excellent family background back east, would cold-bloodedly assist in her husband's murder and then calmly take the time to pack up her clothes and her most precious possessions before making a getaway. It doesn't ring true. For one thing, how could she know that somebody in the building hadn't heard the shot, and had called the police?"

"But wasn't that what did happen?" Malone looked bewildered.

"Fiddlesticks! At least an hour after the crime must have been committed, a man called the police and said he'd heard a shot in the apartment house, but hadn't reported it earlier because he'd been visiting a lady there who wasn't his wife. He wouldn't give his name, and hung up before they could trace the call." She sniffed. "He was the actual murderer, no doubt."

"Oh, his story could have been on the level," the little lawyer said judicially. "I remember certain occasions when even I —"

"Please, Malone — none of your smoking-room reminiscences." She looked at her watch. "I must be brief." Malone murmured something about that being the day, and then poured himself another highball as the schoolteacher went on. "There's more about this thing that you'll have to learn later, but our first visitor should be here any minute. In answer to my ad, you see."

"What ad?" demanded Malone reasonably.

She triumphantly produced a clipping from her capacious handbag. "I had this inserted in every paper in town. *$2000 reward for return of or information about Army officer's luggage marked ASN 0922493, left or checked somewhere in Los Angeles area Friday or Saturday. Phone Arizona 70015.* You see, there was no trace of Ryan's suitcases or dufflebag in the apart-

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ment — just the dead man. His wife and her supposed paramour would hardly have burdened themselves with *his* baggage on their mad flight, so where is it?"

Malone was considerably more interested now, perhaps at the mention of the $2000. "You actually got answers to that ad? Sure it wasn't the police?"

"Quite sure. The police would never bother to memorize that serial number, even if they read the Personals. One of the two men who called me had a most unpleasant voice, oily and greedy. I'm sure he knows something."

"But why make a date with him here? Why not your place?"

"I had my reasons. One is that I happen to have a guest at my bungalow, who mustn't be disturbed. And I confess that I got cold feet about being able to cope with a person who is presumably a member of the underworld. So, since I'd learned that you were in town, I took the liberty of giving him — and the other man too — this hotel and room number, since I figured that someone with a trained legal mind could perhaps handle it better."

"But he'll expect to meet a woman, not me!" Malone arose hopefully, brushing the cigar ashes off his lapel. "Suppose I just run down to the bar for a while, and you call me there if you need me."

Like the Ancient Mariner, she held him with her glittering eye. "John J. Malone, would you desert a lady in distress?" As he sank back weakly, she added, "Perhaps you could masquerade in women's clothes and a wig and *pretend* to be me?"

Malone almost bit a piece out of his glass. "No!" he cried.

"I was afraid of that," sighed the maiden schoolteacher. "But couldn't you be present at the interviews, lurking behind a closet door or something? This first man who called me — he said his name was Kyzer or something — had a most malignant voice, and I'd rather not be alone with him."

The little lawyer was of the personal opinion that Miss Withers could take care of herself with anything up to and including a sabre-toothed tiger, but refrained from saying so. "Okay. You've got the $2000 ready?"

Her eyebrows went up. "Good heavens, do I look like Hetty Green? On second thought I'd just as soon you didn't answer that. No, I have no intentions of paying that money even if Eva does — I mean, even if I had it handy. Not to a man who is hand-in-glove with thieves and murderers or worse. I thought we could worm the information out of him when he gets here — whichever of the two it is. But this Kyzer —"

"Of all your mad ideas —" Malone said. "If anybody does show up, which I doubt, he'll probably just turn out to be a bellboy at some hotel where Colonel Ryan checked in Friday night and left his bags."

"The first man I talked to was no bell-boy. A distinct criminal type."

"Coming here expecting $2000 —

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and me without a weapon in the place except a safety-razor blade!" the little lawyer moaned. "Suppose one of these guys is really a thug? Why, he might be outside in the hall right now, and when he finds out he's on a wild-goose chase —" The phone rang suddenly, and Malone dropped his glass.

"Let me," Miss Withers said quickly. "It must be our first visitor calling from the lobby to see if I'm really here." She picked up the phone, and after a moment put it down. "It's only the bartender downstairs," she said. "He told me to tell Mr. Malone that Sugar says she is leaving and that her bar checks are on your account. Well, thank heavens that's one minor obstacle out of the way. Now we can really put our heads together and figure out a way to save poor little Eva."

"Eva?" queried Malone weakly.

"Yes. Eva Ryan, the missing wife — I mean widow — the police are hunting for."

"Relax. They've probably found her by now," he said hopefully.

The schoolteacher shook her head. "Not unless they've been looking in my spare bedroom, because that's where she's been for four days."

Malone made sounds like a small penguin choking on a large spiny fish. "Oh, it's perfectly all right," Miss Withers assured him. "The girl phoned me at once when she heard over the radio that her husband was dead."

"When she heard it? But she was *there!*"

"No, she wasn't. She'd hastily packed and left before Ryan ever got to the apartment. She took off the second she knew he was in town, because for good and sufficient reasons she wanted no part of him. Eva stayed in a hotel that night and naturally when she found out what had happened she called me — I'm in the phone book and years ago she was one of my pupils at P.S. 38 back in New York and she'd heard of some of my other adventures in Lost Causes —"

"Harboring a fugitive from justice," Malone said ominously. "Accessory after the fact, obstructing justice, *et al*. For this they can throw the book at you —"

There was a knock at the door. "There's your man," Malone whispered. He moved swiftly toward the closet, taking the bottle with him — presumably as a potential weapon.

Miss Withers opened the door with her heart in her mouth — and looked upon a big man with the map of Ireland on his face — a palish, mutton-lard face, now wearing an apologetic smile. "Come in, Mr. Kyzer," she said.

He came in, but he wasn't Mr. Kyzer. "I'm Dan Tendler," he explained. "About this ad of yours —"

The schoolteacher motioned him to a chair. "Yes? You know about the luggage?"

"No, ma'am." The big man crossed his meaty legs, and then uncrossed them. "I don't guess I can qualify for your reward, but — well, you see, I run a bar and grill downtown, and Saturday night my bartender went and cashed a check for a customer, an

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Army officer in uniform. It was only $25 — but the check bounced. And underneath the signature was that same Army serial number you have in your ad — we always require a phone number or address or something and that was all the guy had." He sighed.

Miss Withers brightened. "May I see the check?"

It was on a local bank, signed *W. J. Ryan*. "With business the way it is," said Dan Tendler, "I'd like my twenty-five bucks. If you know where I can get hold of this Ryan —"

"I believe you'll find him at the Morgue," she said. "Don't you read the front pages of the papers?"

The pale face blanched paler still. "You — you mean *that's* the Ryan that got murdered?"

She nodded slowly. "And what can you tell me that would help to find his killer, for the sake of his innocent wife?"

But the man was standing up, sweating. "Lady, I know from nothing. In a business like mine, you lose your license for most anything. I want no part of it. The guy come into my place and had a few drinks and cashed a bum check; that's all I know. I'll kiss the twenty-five goodbye and gladly; I just wanta keep outa it." He edged hopefully toward the door.

"Wait!" said the schoolteacher. "Did Colonel Ryan have any luggage with him when he was in your place that night, a few hours before he was murdered?"

"No, ma'am. Not that I recall. Saturday night is a busy time on the street, people coming and people going alla time. I know from nothing — only I'm out twenty-five bucks. Now I gotta cut the drinks all next week."

"But whom was he with?"

Dan Tendler shrugged. "A coupla guys — no dames, anyway. I wasn't watching." He hesitated at the doorway. "Maybe you don't have to mention this to the police. I try to run a clean place, but the cops and the liquor board bear down on us guys —" He smiled, nodded, and took off — leaving the check in Miss Withers's hand.

"A dry run," said Malone, emerging from the closet. "That's not the guy you want, he's just a saloonkeeper who got stuck with a check. Walter Ryan wasn't in too much of a hurry to get home to his wife, was he? I begin to think you have an angle."

He sat down, with bottle and glass. "What next?"

"I don't know," admitted the schoolteacher. "But things begin to fit into the pattern. Mr. Tendler may know more than he wants to say now, and it may take more authority than we have to make him speak. Perhaps the police —"

"The police are full of thumbs instead of fingers," pronounced John J. Malone as he settled himself in a chair. "Well, that's that. Nothing more tonight, so I can call Sugar —"

"No!" said the schoolteacher. "Mocambo can wait. Human lives are at stake."

"Speaking of steak —" cried Malone hopefully.

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"We have still an appointment with Mr. Kyzer, the man I am most interested in. Sit tight."

Malone sat tight, getting slightly tighter by the moment. And then after perhaps half an hour there came a heavy knocking at the door. "Here we go again," said Malone softly. He picked up the bottle and was about to take off for the closet when a heavy, official voice called out: "Open up in there, this is the police!"

"Already!" gasped the indomitable little lawyer. "Remember, Hildegarde, I'm your attorney and you won't talk unless I'm there. I may be able to cop a plea and get you off with three to five years." He moved toward the door. "Come in, officer. What's the beef?"

Not one but three officers came in as he opened the door, the foremost a weary, graying man in plainclothes who flashed a silver badge and then announced, "I'm Sanders, from Spring Street homicide. You the Malone who has this room? We just want to know why there is a stiff down the hall with your room number scribbled on a piece of paper in his pocket."

Miss Withers opened her mouth to speak, but for once in her life she was beaten to it. Malone said, "*My* room number? There must be some mistake."

"No mistake, Mister." The detective turned wearily toward one of the uniformed men. "Show it to him." It was a slip torn from a pocket memobook, and on it was scribbled *Hotel Southmere, Suite 1014*. Sanders went on. "The guy was about 40, 5-8, 170 pounds, wearing a checked tweed suit. He registered downstairs as William Ross — probably a phoney — and asked for a room on the tenth floor so they gave him 1055. You know anybody by that description?"

Malone hastily denied it. "Well," said the detective, "he knew you and your room number. Maybe you're the one that smashed his skull with a sap an hour ago?"

"Emphatically not," said the little lawyer firmly. "During the last two hours I've been sitting right here, talking with my friend Miss Withers."

"Talking — and working on a bottle, eh?" Detective Sanders looked toward the schoolteacher, plainly indicating that there was no accounting for tastes. "Well, Mr. Malone, suppose you come with us and see if you recognize the stiff."

They all moved out of the room, and Miss Withers — who hadn't actually been forbidden to come — followed them eagerly, trying to look as if she were not there at all.

It had happened in a small bedroom down the hall, a room now crowded with the usual wrecking crew of photographers and fingerprint men, picking up the pieces. By craning her neck the schoolteacher got a good look at the corpse on the rug — a stocky, unpleasant little man who had never had much forehead and now had none whatever. Then she turned her attention to the two pieces of luggage against the wall — an Army footlocker and a big canvas kit-bag, both

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marked with the initials *W.R.* and with a certain serial number which she at least remembered.

Across the room Malone was gazing upon the remains with distaste, and announcing that he had never seen the man in his life. "Just a minute, officer!" cried Miss Withers. "There's something you ought to know —"

"Later, sister." A big blue uniform noticed her, and she found herself shunted none too gently toward the hall door.

"But Sergeant Saunders —"

"Lieutenant Sanders," he corrected, barely looking up. He waved her off with a gesture, then turned to the uniformed man beside him. "All right, Marvin. What d'you mean, this guy's no Army officer?"

"I mean I recognize him, sir. He's a private dick, or was before he lost his license after he was caught being a go-between for some second-story mobs that wanted to make deals with the insurance companies for the return of stolen property. Name of Barney Kyzer, that's it." The sergeant subsided, looking pleased with himself.

"A wronggo, eh? Small loss. Okay." Lieutenant Sanders came out into the hall, Malone beside him. "Well, mister, just how do you account for a shady character like Kyzer having your room number in his pocket?"

"Mr. Malone is a famous criminal lawyer," put in Miss Withers helpfully. "It's possible that Kyzer was a would-be client who was planning to retain him. And —"

"All *right*, sister!" said the detective wearily. "Button it, will you?"

Malone shrugged. "Officer, I wish I could help you, but —"

"I could help you considerably," murmured the schoolteacher under her breath. "But at the moment I wouldn't give you the correct time. *Button it*, indeed!" She moved away, obviously somewhat miffed.

"All right, Malone," the lieutenant was saying. "We've got nothing on you now. But stick around town until we get this cleared up, understand?" He turned back inside, temporarily washing his hands of them both.

"Malone, you'll live out the rest of your days in California if you wait until that man clears up anything more than his own unpleasant complexion," the schoolteacher remarked as she followed the lawyer back to his suite again. "He refuses to listen to anything. If you ever hope to get off to Honolulu, we've got to solve these murders ourselves!"

"Which calls for a solvent," Malone pointed out, and poured one.

"But it is obvious that Kyzer is our link to the murderer of Ryan, who must have followed Kyzer here to silence him, to prevent him from talking to us. Kyzer himself must have been a party to the first murder —"

"He damn well was a party to the second," Malone agreed. "*Ipso facto*."

"So this proves anyway that we're on the right road!"

"Here's one for the road," said the little lawyer, and poured it.

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"But what can we do? Think of something, Malone!"

He was already thinking of something; at the moment he was thinking of relaxing on a couch and calling up Sugar. A vacation was supposed to be a vacation; on second thought the little Irishman decided that San Quentin Prison was no place for a rest, and he could already hear the sniffing of bloodhounds at his heels. "I've got an idea," he cried suddenly, hoping that he really did have one. Yes, there it was, almost full-fledged. "We've got an errand, Hildegarde. Grab your muff and tippet, and let's go." He was already heading for the door, not forgetting to stuff the bottle in his pocket.

"I know what you're up to," she said. "That dead man down the hall — the ex-private-eye. You think he must have had an office somewhere, and if we could get there before the police and search it —"

She was following the little lawyer down the hall. "I mean nothing of the kind," said Malone. "Burglary is beneath me, and besides I never learned how to pick locks. But I was thinking that I ought to talk with Eva Ryan before some smart copper down at Spring Street connects that Army serial number with your phone number —"

"But I didn't give my name or address!"

Malone sighed. "The police have ways of finding those things out. Though the pretty little Ryan widow may not even still be there —"

"How do you know she's pretty?"

"I was only hoping," Malone said, brightening. "Beauty in distress." And he added under his breath, "Also the only person in this case I might ever hope to get a fee from."

As they came down into the lobby he started looking for a taxi, but Miss Withers indicated her own modest coupe parked down the street. "Right," said Malone. "And don't spare the horsepower, both of it. If you get a ticket, I'll take care of it."

She looked at him. "You might have to take thirty days in Lincoln Heights Jail, that's what speeding nowadays usually means in this town." But she stepped it up to a reckless thirty-five. Even so it was a long drive, during which the little lawyer stole several cat-naps and a couple of nips from his bottle, but they finally arrived at a little frame bungalow on a palm-shaded street in West Hollywood. The windows were blank.

"Your bird has flew — I mean flowed," said Malone in deep disappointment.

"Not at all. Eva's probably asleep." Miss Withers used her key and they went inside. Malone, who had straightened his tie and slicked up his hair in preparation for meeting the beauteous widow, found himself suddenly set upon and almost knocked down by a large brown creature whose paws almost touched his shoulder. As he drew back in sudden alarm, the schoolteacher said, "Surely you remember Talley, my poodle? Talley,

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this is no time for antics. Get back to your stove."

"He — he cooks, too?" gasped John J. Malone.

"No, of course not. He just sleeps on the stove when the lid is down, because the pilot light keeps him warm and cosy — something he worked out all by himself. I only hope our Eva is as warm and safe." She raised her voice. "Eva — it's I!"

There was a short pause, and then a girl came out of the bedroom, wearing red pajamas which did nothing to conceal the fact that she was very nicely arranged indeed. She had midnight hair, no lipstick whatever, and eyes dark-rimmed with worry — like two burned holes in a blanket, as the schoolteacher would have said. She was a surprised girl, and a tall girl — so tall that Malone looked up at her with wondering admiration as Miss Withers performed the introductions. "I never lost a client yet," he vouchsafed, encouragingly.

"A lawyer?" cried the girl in dismay. "Has it come to that, already?"

Malone bowed, swaying a little. "Shall we just say a knight in armor, devoted to a fair lady's cause?"

She smiled feebly. "Maybe then I better get dressed like a lady. Excuse me."

The little lawyer would have liked to suggest that she slip into a Bikini bathing suit, but he refrained. The girl disappeared for a few moments, then came back in a terry-cloth robe, still looking luscious. It was hard for Malone to believe that with a wife like this waiting at home any returning soldier would delay for 36 hours, or even 36 minutes, and he gallantly said so.

"I wasn't waiting," Eva explained. "You see, I'd learned months ago that we were never legally married — Walter's divorce from his first wife wasn't final and it was phoney anyway. Some detective named Kyzer framed it. The girl got a rotten deal, and finally committed suicide. Of course, I didn't know any of that then; we married in Las Vegas on the spur of the moment, and were living in the apartment on Wilshire only a few weeks when he was recalled to active duty. As soon as I found out I stopped writing to him, and when he got home I was going to get an annulment."

"I wouldn't mention that to the police, dear," put in Miss Withers thoughtfully. "They'd consider it a possible motive."

Eva nodded, shivering a little. Then Malone spoke up. "Did you know he was finally coming home?"

"No. The first I knew about it was when he called me that Saturday night. He must have been drunk — his voice was thick and fuzzy. He said he was in a bar downtown with a couple of friends, but that they were leaving and he wanted me to come there and celebrate our reunion over a few drinks. He also said he'd brought me something that would make my eyes sparkle and make me change my mind about the annulment."

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"He didn't mention the name of the dive?" asked Miss Withers hopefully.

"Why —" Eva hesitated. "I didn't pay much attention because I had no intention of going, but I seem to remember something about *Dante's Inferno*."

"Aha!" said Miss Withers. "Malone, I smell a mouse." Then suddenly they were interrupted by a thin eerie howl from Talley the poodle, who up until now had been snoozing comfortably at the feet of his mistress.

The schoolteacher leaped up like a Jill-in-the-box. "Talley always does that when he hears a police siren — with a dog's hearing he can get it minutes before we can! And if they're coming here —" She seized Malone and the girl. "We can't take chances now! Out the back way, both of you. Wait in my car on the back parking lot, and if anybody comes around pretend to be necking or something."

Malone opened his mouth to say something gallant, but Miss Withers shoved him ruthlessly toward the door. "Wait!" she cried, and rushed into the bedroom, thrust Eva's more obvious belongings into the girl's weekend case, and then hurled the bag at the fear-paralyzed young woman. "Off with you, now!" Before Eva and Malone were through the back door the schoolteacher was out of her dress and slip and into her nightgown; all the lights in the house were off and the little bungalow was dark and silent as a tomb.

A few seconds later the silence was shattered by the wolf-wail of sirens; a black sedan came tearing down the street and stopped outside with a screech of rubber. Miss Withers, peering through the venetian blinds, nodded grimly as officers piled out, one of them running back along the side of the house to cover the rear door. So, she thought, the police did read the Personal ads, after all. She hastily let down her hair, then rubbed her eyes to make them look red and sleepy. When the heavy pounding came on her front door she was as ready as she ever would be.

But she let it go on for a moment, while she donned a robe and slippers. "Just a minute, just a minute!" she cried, then crossed to the front door, put on the guard-chain, and peered out into the face of Lieutenant Sanders. "May I ask," she snapped, "why you are trying to break in my door at this hour of the night?"

"Police business. Open up."

She opened. As the officers crowded inside, Sanders's eyes bugged out. "It's *you* again," he moaned. "I mighta known!"

"And who else would be living in my house?" She clutched her robe in maidenly modesty.

"I don't know," Sanders snapped. "But I'll damn well find out." He came forward, menacing. "Now just what do you know about the Kyzer murder, and the Ryan shooting?"

"Do sit down," she said, politely offering an easy chair and pulling Talley the poodle away from his usual vociferous welcome of any

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guest. "And I'll tell you. I tried to tell you at the hotel a couple of hours ago, but you said to *button it.*" And that's first round to me, she thought complacently. She went on to tell most, if not quite all.

"So you lured Kyzer to his death?" said Lieutenant Sanders.

"My dear man, it's been years if ever since I lured anybody, anywhere!"

"I mean with this Personal ad!" The man's temper was wearing thin. "You say the Ryan woman gave you this information about the serial number on the missing baggage over the phone? Where did she phone from?"

The schoolteacher shrugged. "Naturally, being a fugitive from justice, accused of a murder she never did, she didn't tell me. But I knew that the person who had Walter Ryan's luggage also had some guilty knowledge or could lead us to someone who did, so I put in an ad and got two answers — I also got Mr. Malone to help and we were waiting for Kyzer — only somebody else got there first. Kyzer checked into the hotel with the bags and took a room on the same floor so they'd be handy to turn over if he was sure we were on the level, obviously."

"You and this lawyer Malone, eh? Why didn't he come forward with the information, huh?"

"You'll have to ask *him*," the schoolteacher said sweetly.

"Don't think we won't." The lieutenant stood up suddenly. "Personally, I think you know where Malone is — and the widow too." He nodded to his men. "Shake down the dump." And as they moved in quick obedience, he whirled on the schoolteacher again. "So why do *you* have to play amateur detective in this thing, eh?"

"Amateur I may be," Miss Withers came back. "But I can think of some other things besides the missing bags that slipped your official attention. How about the autopsy? Have they analyzed Ryan's stomach?"

"There's not much need of an autopsy on a guy with a .38 slug in his brain!"

"And if Lieutenant-Colonel Ryan had been carrying a pistol it would have been the official .45," she countered. "I checked, and the Army doesn't use the .38. So there goes your neat theory about the man's being killed with his own gun."

Sanders scowled. "And," she continued, "I wish for your own sake you'd see if they did a stomach analysis, and if not, order it done at once."

"I'm giving the orders around here!" he snapped. He broke off as the two uniformed men came back into the room. "Well?"

"Nothing, Loot, Only —" the man held up a pair of exotic red pajamas, and Miss Withers shivered in her slippers. "These surely ain't *yours*, lady?"

There was an icy pause, and then Miss Withers drew herself up haughtily. "Even maiden schoolteachers have their moments, if it's any of

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your business!" And she snatched the telltale garment to her bosom. "Is a lady to have no secrets at all?"

Lieutenant Sanders shook his head, but he was almost grinning. He nodded to his minions and they started to the door. Then he paused, sniffing. His eyes turned toward a bowl holding the schoolteacher's precious African violets, on the rim of which she saw to her horror a fat, half-smoked perfecto. "You smoke cigars, *too?*" he said with heavy sarcasm.

"Some women prefer them —" she began, and then saw it wasn't going to work. "However, if you must know, Mr. Malone drove me home this evening and came in for a few moments' chat."

"Oh," he said flatly. "Malone again. I think we'll just have a nice talk with that little shyster, in the back room at headquarters. We'll take your statement later — you be at Spring Street homicide at 9 tomorrow or we'll bring you there in the paddy-wagon, understand?"

She beamed at him from the doorway. "I'll always be most happy to give you any advice I can at any time, officer." His snort was loud and rude, but he went off toward the police car. The car was hardly out of sight when Miss Withers was into her clothes again and hastily putting back her hair. Then she rushed out the back way to where the anxious — and widely separated — couple were waiting in her little coupe.

"Quick, Malone!" she cried. "They've gone off looking for you, and we'll have to work fast. You must go to the deputy-coroner's office and find out about the autopsy, and I must get down to that dive on Main Street called Danny's Inferno —"

"And what about me?" asked Eva plaintively. "Do I just walk the streets in a robe and slippers until somebody arrests me or I freeze to death?"

"You go back to bed, child," the schoolteacher said.

"But —"

"The police just searched the place, and aren't likely to search it again. It's the safest spot in town for you. Run along now — and wish us luck." They roared away, with the girl and Talley looking wistfully after them.

Malone took a last sip from the upturned bottle and dropped it meticulously into a trash can as they came out of the alley. "I don't like this," he said.

"My driving?" She reared up.

"I don't like that much either. But I was going to say that you've got things all wrong. You can get more out of the deputy-coroner's office than I can — and I can certainly case a saloon better than you, being more familiar with the terrain."

"Again I advise Antabuse," she told him. "But after all, there is something in what you say. So be it. When I get through with my errand at City Hall I'll come down to the Inferno and drag you away from the bar and the B-girls."

"You wrong me, dear lady," Ma-

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lone said. "If I do have to take a drink, it will only be to loosen the bartender's tongue."

She looked at him, with a twelve-pound look.

Such was her haste that she dropped Malone off near a taxi-stand on Park Place, turning north toward City Hall. Miss Withers spent twenty minutes in finding the right office — the one lighted office in a long dusky corridor — and another half an hour in getting the information she sought from sleepy incumbents, during which she had to swear to all sorts of imaginary kinship with the murdered man. "But then," she told her conscience, "all human beings are cousins, under Adam or the apes."

Anyway, she had found that her hunch was true. It had not been only alcohol which had made Lieutenant-Colonel Walter Ryan's voice sound thick and fuzzy over the phone to his estranged wife — the wife who was so frightened of his coming that she had packed and got out of the apartment posthaste. There had, it seemed, been a routine test made of the dead man's stomach, and while alcohol had shown up in abundance, there had also been traces of chloral hydrate.

"Knockout drops!" said Miss Withers as she wheeled down Main Street, the Skid Row of Los Angeles, past honky tonks and burlesque houses and all-night movies, past tattoo-palaces and a hundred evil-looking bars which advertised "Girly" shows. The place called Danny's Inferno would, she felt, bear some looking into, since that was where Ryan had cashed his check and no doubt been drugged. She felt certain qualms about Malone's being there at all, and wished she had warned him to abstain completely from drinking anything. Not that it would have done any good, she said to herself.

She nearly missed the place when she came to it, for the big electric sign was dark. Hastily parking in a yellow zone — and resolving to make Malone pay for the inevitable ticket — she rushed up to the front doors, which bore a handprinted sign *Sorry — Closed.*

The curtains were drawn tight, but she fancied she could see a faint crack of light. She hammered firmly on the door, but nothing happened. Then, placing her ear against the panel, she heard male voices raised in song; it was a duet in which the more prominent voice was one she knew only too well. "Malone rides again!" the schoolteacher said with a sigh, and went on hammering.

The duet continued unabated — they were doing *The Rose of Tralee* with flourishes. In exasperation Miss Withers kicked the door.

"Step aside, sister," said a hoarse male voice behind her. "We'll gladly smash it in for you." She turned, to look again into the not especially pleasant face of Lieutenant Sanders. "Oh, *no!*" he cried. "Not three times in one night! How do you get around, on a broomstick?"

"I'd prefer a broomstick to a night-

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stick any time," she snapped. "But go ahead and see if you can get inside the place. Malone is in there, and I fear the worst."

"Him too?" Sanders took a pistol from his pocket and tapped the glass of the front window, almost but not quite hard enough to crack it. "Malone I want to see," said the lieutenant grimly. "And when I do, he's going to sing out of the other side of his mouth." He rapped again — harder — and this time the glass did crack. The singing inside stopped abruptly, and a moment later the door was jerked open.

"What the bloody hell —?" roared Dan Tendler. "Can't you see I'm closed?" His voice trailed away as he caught a flash of the badge cupped in Sanders's hand, and his pudgy pale face grew paler still. Silently he stepped back, and they entered a dimly lit, longish barroom, smelling of stale alcohol and staler tobacco, and with murals on the walls which Miss Withers glanced at once and then kept her maidenly eyes well away from.

Malone was leaning at the far end of the bar, a glass of beer in his hand a bottle of rye before him. He looked up with innocent pleasure. "Why, if it ishn't the Loot and my pal Mish Wizzersh! Join the party, folks. Have a drink on my good friend Danny —"

"Shut up, shyster," snapped Sanders. "Your turn comes later." He whirled on the owner of the place. "Listen, you. Did a bum known as Hoppy work here?"

The big man nodded. "Sweeps out the place, cleans up tables, washes glasses. Or he did. Hoppy didn't show up Sunday."

"You know why?"

"Somebody said he was took sick."

"He was took dead," Sanders rasped. "About an hour ago in County Hospital — from something he drank in this dump!" The policeman edged closer. "You know what that means?"

Tendler looked from one to the other, with tears in his eyes. "Honest, I know from nothing. Hoppy had a habit of finishing any drinks left on the tables, and maybe —"

"No maybe. You know what he got."

The big man nodded slowly. "It musta been a Mickey. I phoned the hospital, and that's what they said. He had a weak heart —"

"That's why you're closed up, at only midnight?"

Tendler nodded again. "Outa sympathy for poor Hoppy. And — and because —" the man smiled sheepishly. "You know when somebody gets a Mickey in a bar, the place is padlocked. I was just having a sort of wake about it with Mr. Malone here."

"No friend like a new friend!" sang out Malone happily, and then at the lieutenant's look buried his face hastily in his glass.

Sanders stuck a pugnacious chin into the bigger man's face. "All right, Tendler. Why'd you do it?"

"*Me*, Lieutenant? By my sainted

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mother in heaven, I never slipped anybody a Mickey in me life!" The man was shaking like jelly.

"Just a minute, please," spoke up Miss Withers. "I think I know who really did it." As Sanders turned on her, she continued sweetly, "I happen to know that Walter Ryan phoned his wife from here that night, and his voice was thick and fuzzy — one of the first symptoms of chloral hydrate. And I also happened to check with the deputy-coroner's office a few minutes ago, and Ryan was undoubtedly unconscious from the drug when he was shot. He must have got the knockout drops here — given him, presumably, by one Barney Kyzer."

"*What?*" Sanders ripped a photograph from his pocket and shoved it before the big man's eyes. "You know this fellow? Was he here that night?"

Tendler took a hopeful breath. "Sure I do, sure," he said, wincing a little at the dead, bloodied face. "He came in quite often — yes, I seem to remember he was here that night."

"With this guy?" Sanders produced another Morgue photo, this time of a handsome youngish man with an Army crew-cut.

"I — I think so. Yes, they was sitting in that rear booth, and they stopped talking whenever I brought over another round of drinks. The good-looking guy cashed a bum check, and once he staggered over to the bar to get change for the phone. He was definitely feeling no pain."

"You see, Lieutenant?" Miss Withers's voice was sweet.

But he ignored her. "There were just the two of them, then?"

"Yes — I mean no." Tendler's eyes narrowed in concentration. "First the two, then three."

"And the third man?"

Tendler was thinking hard, evidently most anxious to please. "I seen him once or twice before, I guess. Not a regular. He was a lean, gnarly little guy with a nose too big for him, dressed sorta zoot-suit style, with a high squeaky voice."

The lieutenant was making notes. "And that," put in Miss Hildegarde Withers, "is the man who killed Kyzer in the hotel tonight — to keep him from giving the whole show away by turning their victim's luggage over to me, in the hope of making an extra two thousand dollars. Don't you see, Lieutenant? They must have doped Ryan's drink, of which he drank only a part. He still had strength enough to phone his wife and get out to the apartment in a taxi before he dropped. They followed him there, found him unconscious, and shot him."

"Speaking of drinks —" began Malone.

But Sanders faced Miss Withers. "Lady, what motive would anybody have to kill a man who'd been out of the country for years?" The policeman was weary.

"What motive indeed — unless Ryan was in possession of something very valuable that he'd brought home from overseas? According to Eva

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Ryan, her husband's job with the army of occupation was with JAG, which was charged with the impounded assets of the National Bank of Tokyo. There must have been jewels — if so, that would explain Ryan's remark to his wife over the phone that he'd show her something to make her eyes glitter!"

"I always have found," Malone put in reminiscently from his distance, "that breaking a hundred-dollar bill in a bar does the same thing."

"Go on!" Sanders ordered grimly. "I mean *you*, lady."

"I'll try. It's all deduction, with a smattering of guesswork. But if Ryan pocketed a fistful of precious stones at the time of the fall of Japan —"

"You mean to tell me that a guy like that would sit there for that many years waiting to cash in?"

"Of course he would! He was smart, smarter than the Army officer who pulled the same trick in Germany and came home only to get caught when he tried to trade an emerald for a new automobile — you read about that. That's why Ryan didn't ask for leave or discharge for so long; he wanted the missing loot to be forgotten and he wanted to wangle some Korean duty so he could come back from a combat area as a hero. I understand there's little or no customs inspection for such men."

Sanders nodded slowly. "Some sense in that. But why would a guy that smart hunt up Kyzer and another thug and get drunk and tell them all about it in a bar?"

"He didn't, Lieutenant. He must have hunted up Kyzer — who had once worked for him on a framed divorce case and whom he knew had lost his license for dealing with the underworld — because he thought that for a fee the man would introduce him to a professional receiver of stolen property."

"A fence, we say." In spite of himself, Sanders was growing interested.

"Evidently Kyzer pretended to fall in with it, and introduced him to the third man. But the two thugs put their heads together, having correctly figured that Ryan must have hidden the loot in a railroad station locker or in a hotel. They drugged Ryan, followed him home, found the locker key in his pocket, and then shot him to silence him forever — figuring the murder would be blamed on his wife, as it was."

"Beautiful wife," put in Malone helpfully. "Never shushpected her a minute."

Sanders waved at him. "Go on, lady. It's mostly maybes, but go on."

"Well," continued Miss Withers, "even for a fence, jewels take time to handle. Kyzer was greedy, and he fell for my trap and the offer of the reward for the now valueless luggage — which of course by this time they'd found and stripped. But the third man also read the ad, watched Kyzer, followed him to the hotel and bashed out his brains before Kyzer could spill anything, thus leaving himself in full possession of the loot. Simple, isn't it?" she added.

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Lieutenant Sanders's mouth was tight. "The third man! Well, we gotta good description. We'll round up every fence in the area first thing tomorrow morning, and have a line-up." He turned to Dan Tendler. "You be at my office at 9 sharp, Fatso. If you can identify this guy for us maybe I'll see that you don't get padlocked after all."

The big man's face lit up with hope. "Sure, and I'll be there," he cried, shaking Sanders's hand until the detective winced.

The lieutenant started to go, then whirled on Malone. "As for you, shyster —"

"Mr. Malone didn't offer any information at the hotel because he thought he was protecting his client's interests," Miss Withers put in quickly. "Or the girl he thought might become his client. Besides, he's in no condition to be questioned now."

"None whatever, ash you can plainly she," agreed Malone amiably.

The detective hesitated. "All of you at my office, then," he capitulated. "Or else!" He went out without farewells, slamming the door so that the cracked window cracked a little more.

The barroom was silent for a long long moment. "Come, Malone," said the schoolteacher firmly. "Time to go beddy-bye."

"No!" he protested, clutching his bottle. "The wake's not over. I'll have 'nother drink and 'nother singsong with my pal Danny-boy." He draped his arm lovingly over the big man's shoulders. "You know *Mother Machree?*"

Tendler was apologetic. "Sure do, Mr. Malone. But I guess I better close the place up. I'm not feeling so good. Some other time, huh?" He went over to the cash register, hit a key, and scooped out every last dime. Then he reached into the back row of bottles which lined the rear of the bar, choosing a bottle of rum. He stripped off his apron and lovingly stuffed the bottle in his coat pocket. "Nothing like a hot rum toddy to make a man sleep after a hard day — and believe me, folks, this was plenty hard. Murder in my own place — probably lose my license — a bum check —" He sighed, and moved toward the light switch. "Okay, folks."

Malone finished his drink somewhat reluctantly, while Miss Withers tapped an impatient foot. "Look," the little Irishman cried, suddenly inspired. "We can't just let my pal Danny go home alone, and him in his cups and not feeling himself at all."

"Aw, I'm okay!" Tendler protested.

"No. My pal Mish Wizzersh here gotta car outside, we'll drive you." The big man protested, but Malone would not take no for an answer — though the schoolteacher, thinking wistfully of bed and also of the anxious girl waiting for her at home, glared at him. They came out to her car — which had its ticket, as she had expected — and wheeled off, Malone

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and his lifelong friend of one evening together in the back seat, singing *In Dublin's fair city, where the girls are so pretty. . . .*"

Luckily for her ear-drums and for her temper, it was a relatively short ride to a modest apartment in the Ambassador section. Dan Tendler climbed out hastily, said a mumbled word of thanks, and went a bit unsteadily inside, evidently deaf to Malone's suggestion that they had just time to come in for one last drink. The doors closed behind the man, and Miss Withers put the car into gear.

"Hold it," said Malone when they were halfway down the block.

She looked at him askance. "Isn't it time for the bars to close?"

"No bars indicated," he said, in a different voice.

"Malone, you're cold sober!" she gasped.

"Only relatively, ma'am. I spent a lot of time, and had to have a lot of drinks, trying to get next to Mr. Tendler."

"Yes, I know. But *why?*"

"Turn the car around and park over there in the shadows, and I'll show you."

Bewildered, she obeyed, and they sat there for a few minutes. "I've made a bet with myself," Malone explained. "And I think I'll win it. Watch."

They watched for nearly half an hour. Then a taxicab came up before Tendler's apartment house and beeped its horn three times. The man came out a moment later, wearing a hat and topcoat and carrying a small suitcase. He entered the cab, which made a U-turn and roared off south.

"Here we go," said John J. Malone. "Hildegarde, will you for *once* see if you can get this heap out of second-gear?"

It was a lost cause. Miss Withers almost caught up with the taxicab at one red light, but traffic at this late hour was light and once on the boulevard the cab drew steadily away. Finally it was gone. "What do we do now?" she demanded.

"Keep going," said Malone sensibly, gesturing toward a sign at the intersection which read *Los Angeles City Airport — 5 miles.* "That's where he's headed, and if there's a plane leaving for anywhere in the next few minutes we're ruined! Can't you go any faster?"

"I suppose I could get out and push," snapped the schoolteacher. "But I still don't understand —"

"Tendler is the third man," explained the little lawyer. "I thought you were getting suspicious too when Tendler remembered Ryan and Kyzer after so long a time and could even describe the third man down to his clothes and voice — the voice he wasn't supposed to've heard because they stopped talking whenever he came near. And the description of the third man was just the exact opposite of his own — he overdid it there! He wasn't calling on you in the hotel because of the check — I'd guess he wrote it himself as an excuse to butt

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in and find out what was going on; he found out enough to make him see he had to get rid of Kyzer then and there, which he did. But it puts him in the hotel at the moment of the murder. I wasn't really sure, however, until he took home a bottle of rum — after him drinking good Irish whiskey with me for two hours! A whiskey man doesn't drink rum, not with him having the choice of the bar."

The schoolteacher gasped. "And he's going to get away with it? Not on your life. I have one shot left in my locker, so hang onto your hat." She shot it — coming to an intersection where a motorcycle officer was lurking, she crossed the street against a red light with her horn blaring. There was the howl of a siren and she was flagged down. "Thank heavens," she said fervently as the very young, pink-cheeked officer came forward.

"Just where is the fire, lady?"

"It'll be under your pants," Malone told him, "unless you use your little radio and get a cruise car out to the airport in time to stop a big fat man who's probably getting out of a taxi right now and climbing aboard a Mexico City plane. We're on the trail of a double murderer, my man. Working with Lieutenant Sanders."

"I've heard 'em all, but that's a new one. You say you know Sanders. Describe him."

"He's a rude, impolite character who throws his weight around," put in Miss Withers. "He has a pot-belly, an unpleasant complexion, and a most unpleasant manner."

The officer froze, and then his face broke into a reluctant grin. "You know Lieutenant Sanders all right; I worked under him before I got transferred. Just for the hell of it, I'll make that call."

Miss Withers and Malone sat with crossed fingers while he spoke briefly into his walkie-talkie. Then something he heard galvanized the youthful cop into action. He leaped aboard his motorcycle and dashed away.

"It's a shame," said the schoolteacher thoughtfully, "that he didn't give us a chance to tell him to look for the jewels in the bottle of rum which your bosom pal Danny Tendler is intending to smuggle into Mexico."

"They'll find it," Malone assured her. "We gave them enough and they can figure out the rest. My pal Danny is going nowhere but to the gas chamber."

She turned the little coupe around. "And now, Malone, you can go back to your hotel and nurse your hangover — which I'll admit you acquired in a good cause. I'll go home and take the good news to little Eva. And tomorrow night you can take Sugar to Mocambo."

John J. Malone hesitated. "Hildegarde, have you ever been to Mocambo?"

"Me? No, of course not. My tastes and my wardrobe are more fitted for Barney's Beanery, with its $1.25 dinners. But if you insist —"

"I think I insist," said the little lawyer gallantly. "But do you know, Maggie will *never* believe this!"

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SPECIAL POSTHUMOUS AWARD

for a hitherto unpublished story by Ring Lardner

Ring Lardner "stopped finding any fun in his work ten years before he died" — according to his close friend, F. Scott Fitzgerald. Perhaps one of the reasons for Ring Lardner's having become a frustrated, melancholy man was because the world, especially most of its literary critics, insisted on considering Mr. Lardner no more than a sports writer and humorist, interested only in laughs. Today we know differently. William Bolitho, that perceptive man, regarded Ring Lardner as "the greatest and sincerest pessimist America has produced." Today we know Ring Lardner for the superb satirist he was — a "sympathetic hater of the human four-flusher," be he (or she) a baseball player or a politician, a Broadway producer or a small-town prodigal son, a Manhattan call girl or a Long Island socialite, a lowbrow dick or a highbrow criminologist . . .

And now we give you a hitherto unpublished story by that great writer who, at his best, "wrote about Americans in the language of Americans." Where in the world did we find such a wondrous rarity? Well, it came knocking at our door, and at the first rap we heard the Voice of Opportunity. So far as we have been able to check, this is the only unpublished story by Ring Lardner in existence. It was originally purchased from Mr. Lardner by "Cosmopolitan" magazine just about 20 years ago. We have reliable information that "Cosmopolitan" paid $5000 for the first serial rights. But for one reason or another the story never actually appeared in "Cosmopolitan," and years later, when part of "Cosmopolitan's" unpublished inventory was transferred to another Hearst magazine, the story found itself in the coffers of "Good Housekeeping." Again the story sank into seeming oblivion — for "Good Housekeeping" also failed to publish it. And last year, as the result of another reshuffling of inventories, the story came upon the market, and was offered to EQMM.

Well, we think that any *unpublished story by Ring Lardner has more than passing interest. And when we learned that the story was actually a tale of detection — and that rara avis, the parody with 'tec tongue in cheek — we could not resist paying a posthumous tribute to the memory of one of America's finest writers.*

Now, in Ring Lardner's own vernacular, leave us be realists: "Claude

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Diphthong, Student of Crime" is not one of the Master's great works. It is admittedly, for example, not in the same league with Mr. Lardner's magnificent story, "Haircut." Nevertheless, you will find flashes — and very funny flashes — of that grand old satirist and shrewd observer, and these flashes alone are worth the price of admission. Besides, haven't we often said: One man's humor is another man's homicide . . .

Meet Claude Diphthong, dilettante detective, foppish ferret, bloodhound with a bugle — and a rabid collector of handlebars of old bicycles.

CLAUDE DIPHTHONG, STUDENT OF CRIME

by RING LARDNER

ON A BLUSTERY MORNING IN JANUary, all New York was startled by news of the murder of Gardner Lyle, a vice president of the Bank of Gotham, international polo star, former all-American halfback, famous captain of a famous Yale crew, and divorced husband of the renowned Margalo Trawley, regarded as the Follies' most beautiful show girl.

The crime had been discovered by Lincoln H. Martingale, house detective at the exclusive Hotel Baldwin, where Lyle had lived since the separation from his wife. Martingale, entering Lyle's room at 2 o'clock in the morning, had found the body under the bed with the head protruding from one side and the feet from the other. The deceased was fully clothed except that he wore no shoes. There was a bullet hole through his head and two holes in his stockings, indicating that the crime had been committed either by a maniac or a very clumsy marksman.

The house detective had immediately telephoned police headquarters and the summons had been answered by Detectives Burke and McMahon of the Murder Squad. These two had sprung into fame a few years previously by their work in connection with the Telwell case and a Wall Street bombing mystery. Their successes in the past were attributable rather to wide-awake, plodding diligence than to any abnormal powers of observation and deduction such as are usually found in the sleuths of fiction. Both were illiterate and their misuse of the English language afforded some amusement to the more educated among their colleagues. But New York's underworld did not consider them funny and more than one attempt to put them out of the way had been made by desperadoes.

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Conducted into Lyle's room by Martingale, the pair from headquarters gazed for a moment at the body.

"Poor young fella!" said Burke at length. "I didn't really know him, but I've seen him many a time in restaurants and night clubs, enjoying himself to the limit."

"He was a great lady's man," put in McMahon. "I wouldn't be surprised if a woman was responsible for his tragic end."

"That is my theory," Martingale said. "It may seem queer to you that a gentleman of Mr. Lyle's standing should take a house detective into his confidence, but just the same I was not entirely ignorant of his affairs of the heart. If he were still living, I would never breathe any of the things he told me, but now I see no reason not to speak out. In fact, it is extremely likely that one or two bits of information I can give you will be of assistance in clearing up this dastardly crime."

"If you put us on the right track, I'll guarantee that you will never regret it," said Detective Burke.

"Well, then," said Martingale, "since Mr. Lyle's divorce, he has kept company with several young women, mostly of the stage. There was nothing serious in his relations with them. He liked female companionship and merely took them with him to dinner or to the night clubs at which you, Mr. Burke, frequently saw him. But this last November he became acquainted with a beautiful society girl who had just returned from Europe where she had attended school for years. Mr. Lyle was infatuated with this girl and she with him, and for a while I was positive that their devotion to one another would result in his second embarkation on the matrimonial sea.

"About two weeks ago, however, Mr. Lyle said to me, 'Martingale,' he said, 'your career as a pugilist is serving you in good stead. That broken nose of yours and those mushroom ears are your defense against women. You owe a debt of gratitude to whoever gave them to you. For beauty is a curse, Martingale, and I would gladly trade my nose and ears for yours. My good looks have won a girl's heart, a girl I thought I cared for, but of whom I have grown tired. We were engaged, and last night I broke it off, or tried to. She went into hysterics and swore she would never give me up; that unless I married her, she would shoot me. I am not afraid of her carrying out that threat, but she is pestering me to death, Martingale, and I doubt not that she will continue to pester me until old age has wrought havoc with these innocent though fatal features.'

"That is what Mr. Lyle told me only two weeks ago, gentlemen, and on two or three occasions since then, he repeated it until I became bored and offered to rearrange his nose and ears so that they would resemble mine. He declined the offer, but I had resolved to force him to accept it if he brought up the subject just once more.

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"I have nothing more to tell you save that night before last, while I was making my rounds of this floor, I encountered the girl tiptoeing to and fro in front of this very door. I recognized her from the newspaper pictures, but when I called her by name, she denied her identity and explained her presence by asserting that she was engaged in a game of Guggenheim with the bell captain."

"And who is she?" demanded Detective McMahon when Martingale had ended his recital.

"Flossie Campion," was the house detective's reply.

McMahon and Burke gasped, and no wonder, for Flossie Campion was the wealthiest of New York's younger society girls, a prominent whip and extremely attractive except for her teeth, with which she had had so much trouble that her chums had given her the sobriquet of Dental Floss.

"What a story, if it's true!" murmured Burke. "Come on, Mac!" he added, rising hastily from the bed under which Lyle lay. "We must get this girl before she flies her kite. There is no time to be lost."

"If there was, you'd lose it," retorted his companion, but with a laugh which took out part of the sting.

The two headquarters men were about to leave the room when a knock was heard at the door, and in response to Martingale's "Come in!" there entered Gabriel Downey, star police reporter on the *Morning Light*, accompanied by a dapper young man of about 30 who carried a bugle.

"Hello, McMahon! Hello, Burke!" said the reporter. "And I suppose this is Mr. Martingale," he added, addressing himself to the house detective.

Martingale bowed modestly and shook Downey's proffered hand. Burke and McMahon greeted the *Morning Light* representative cordially; they knew the value of friendly relations with a prominent newspaperman.

"I want you all to meet Mr. Claude Diphthong," Downey continued, presenting his foppish companion. "Mr. Diphthong is quite a student of crime in an amateur way and has been a valuable volunteer aid to the police of Scotland Yard, Piping Rock, and Chevy Chase. I thought it very probable you would be glad of his assistance in this mystery, which, on the surface, appears the most baffling in New York criminal annals."

Diphthong bowed gravely to the three "dicks." He was a man of slight build, the last man in the world you would have expected to see lugging a big bugle around with him. He was the orphaned son of old Verne Diphthong, known years ago on Wall Street as "Shake Yo' Feet" Diphthong because of his habit of doing a dance on the floor of the Stock Exchange every time he had put over a big coup in hay or grain. Young Claude, independently rich, had studied bugling under Piccolini in Florence, dabbled in criminology in all the capitals of Europe, and was now

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in New York living a life that would have bored him to extinction but for his occasional chances to practice sleuthing and his interest in collecting the handlebars of old bicycles.

"We don't need no help," said Burke surlily. "We know who done this thing and we was just going out to get her when you gentlemen showed up."

"May I ask whom you were about to arrest?" Diphthong inquired politely.

"I don't see that it's your business," replied Burke, "but the whole world will learn the truth in a few hours, so I may as well tell you now. It's Flossie Campion, the society dame who was Lyle's latest sweetie."

"But why pick on her?" remonstrated Diphthong. "Presuming she had a motive, what is your theory as to how she committed the crime?"

"It's perfectly simple," said McMahon. "She bought herself a gun and come in here while he was asleep and popped him through the head."

"But listen," said Martingale, "that don't account for the holes in his socks. Who shot *them?*"

"Mr. Martingale," Diphthong said, "the holes in the hosiery are not bullet holes. They were inflicted by some blunt instrument, probably a toe. However," he continued, turning to McMahon and Burke, "if you men don't want to become the laughing stockings of New York, I would advise you not to arrest Miss Campion. The shot that killed Lyle was fired by a tall, left-handed man with a walrus mustache, who spoke with a southern drool."

This announcement, made in a calm tone, left the four auditors temporarily speechless. The silence was broken by Burke, who said to Downey with a sneer:

"I guess your friend Mr. Whatever-his-name-is likes his joke. Personally, I don't think this is the proper time for kidding. If you will pardon Mac and I, we will go ahead with our little errand."

"I can assure you," Downey replied, "that Mr. Diphthong is not jesting. He has a reason for believing that what he just told us is true. What that reason is I do not know. But he has warned you not to arrest Miss Campion and if I were you, I would heed that warning."

"Don't waste time, Gabriel," said Diphthong. "You can never win an argument from a detective, a southern woman, or a garage. Let them pursue the fair Flossie. They won't find her anyway and their absence will give us a chance for an uninterrupted investigation."

"What do you mean, we won't find her?" demanded Burke.

"Just what I say," Diphthong replied. "On last Tuesday morning Miss Campion became the wife of Sir Albert Lawlow, head of the Pullman Company's towel department, and they are now halfway across the Atlantic on their honeymoon."

"Impossible!" ejaculated McMahon. "If it was true, it would of been in the papers!"

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"It was in the papers," Diphthong retorted. "Whoever reads the papers to you evidently skips the society news. And no wonder!"

"Let's go, Burkey!" said McMahon. "We'll find out for ourself."

The two detectives left the room and Martingale was about to follow them, but was stopped by Diphthong.

"Just a question or two before you go," said the young dilettante. "How did you happen to come in here and discover the body at 2 o'clock in the morning?"

"That's easily answered," said Martingale. "I came in to change the bedding and see if there was any mail."

"Mail for whom?"

"For me," said Martingale. "I was expecting a letter from a man named Leonard K. Failing, in the partridge business in Lancaster, Pennsylvania."

"Why would a letter for you be in Lyle's room?"

"I don't suppose it would," replied Martingale. "But Mr. Lyle got so many letters that it was hard to believe they were all for him."

"Fair enough," said Diphthong. "Now will you tell me how you account for the fact that Lyle was not wearing shoes?"

"My theory is that Mr. Lyle was asleep," said the house detective, "and a great many people sleep without their shoes."

"That's all for now," said Diphthong. "I may question you again later on."

Downey was glad to be left alone with his friend, in whom he had great faith. He wanted to know what had led Diphthong to deduce that the fatal shot had been fired by a tall southern left-hander who wore a walrus mustache. But he was obliged to wait. Claude had started undressing, a sure sign that some phase of the problem was giving him considerable difficulty. After about twenty minutes, he laid his music aside and said:

"Gabriel, no matter how careful or how clever a murderer may be, he always leaves some tell-tale mark behind, some unmistakable evidence of his identity which is bound to convict him unless those investigating the crime are deaf, dumb, and blind. I had hoped this case might prove an exception to the rule, for at first glance it looked as if the slayer were a person of extraordinary intelligence. But he made one fatal mistake, and that mistake has not only destroyed him, but has spoiled what promised to be an interesting weekend for me."

"Who is he?" asked Downey, doing the split.

Diphthong seemed not to hear.

"I recall a case in Mineral Wells, Texas, almost an exact duplicate of this, except that in that case the victim was an old woman and she died of hunger. A bugle salesman had persuaded her to invest all her savings in the partridge business in Pennsylvania. She lost everything. In spite of her extreme age, she tried to earn a living mowing lawns and putting cufflinks in evening shirts, but she was unable to support herself in this way and gradually starved. The Mineral

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Wells police were baffled and sent for me. It took me three and a half days to make the trip out there and five minutes to learn the truth."

"I don't see the resemblance between that mystery and this," said Downey.

"The Texas woman," Diphthong explained, "was also found under a bed, and also *without shoes!*"

"Well?" said Downey.

"Well," said his friend, putting his clothes back on, "it means we haven't far to go. Of course your reason has told you that this killing was the work of a coward. Lyle, we are informed, was an international polo mount and a famous coxcomb of a famous Yale crew. And it takes a high degree of courage to risk a hand-to-hand encounter with a man of his strength and athletic prowess, even if you have a gun."

"But if he was asleep —"

"Asleep? In his dinner clothes? Tut, tut, Gabriel! Hoot mon!"

"I can't keep pace with you, Diphthong," said Downey. "I wish you would begin at the beginning and tell me just what happened here last night — if you know."

"I know as well as if I had been in the room. Early in the evening he received a note, which he tore up and threw in the wastebasket. Let's see what it says."

Diphthong emptied the basket's contents into his lap and rapidly blew the fragments of the note together with his bugle.

" 'My dear Mr. Lyle,' " he read. " 'As I write to you about your contribution to the Playground and Recreation Association of America, my mind goes back to a visit to a schoolroom recently, when I pointed out to the schoolteacher the five girls and boys most interesting to me. She told me the five I had picked out were the worst in the school. What she really meant was that they were the most alive and therefore most likely to cause trouble and to get into difficulties with school discipline.' "

Diphthong stifled a cough.

"I will skip a little," he said. "Now: 'It is our belief that boys and girls on the playgrounds can be trained so that they always know plenty of things to do that are not bad. The testimony of juvenile court judges confirms our belief. Last year alone 732 new play areas were established.' "

Diphthong tossed the note back into the basket.

"There, Gabriel!" he commented triumphantly. "That is right in line with my logic."

"How?"

"It shows Lyle's passionate interest in children. He always wanted a large family, but Margalo Trawley bore him nothing but a grudge. Now, then, he receives this letter from the Playground Association and it depresses him. He is dressed to go out to dinner, but decides that in his present mood he would be a wet blanket at a party. So he takes off his shoes and crawls under the bed to go to sleep when suddenly the closet door opens and out steps the murderer!"

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"But who?" asked Downey impatiently.

"A man five feet eleven and a half inches tall, who talks with a megaphone, has a double chin with a goatee on each, is splayfooted, carries a package of sunflower seeds on the chance he may meet a parrot, distends his nostrils when upset, wears bicycle clips on his trousers though he does not ride, constantly dashes into doctors' offices and demands that his temperature be taken, and lives in mortal dread of being snapped at by a ground mole. His initials are L.K.F."

"Claude, you are uncanny!" cried his friend. "And now you must tell me how you deduced all this."

"Oh, no, Gabriel!" said Diphthong with a smile. "If I were to let you in on the secret, you would lose all respect for my art. You would think: 'It's so simple that anyone could have done it.' From my point of view, it is much better to give you only the results and keep you mystified as to how I obtained them. I hear voices in the corridor and if I am not mistaken, our friends Burke and McMahon are back, without, I'll wager you, their quarry."

Even as he ceased speaking, the door swung open and the two headquarters men came in, but not alone. With them was one of the most beautiful young women Downey had ever laid eyes on, beautiful despite the tears that were streaming down her face and the fact that she had not been given time to complete her toilet. She was handcuffed and her arms were tightly grasped by her captors.

"Well, my smart young upstart," said Burke to Diphthong, "here is Miss Campion and we didn't have to go halfway cross no ocean to get her neither! Besides that, she ain't no more married than George Ade!"

Downey felt terribly embarrassed for his friend and was sorry he had coaxed him into the case. But if Claude Diphthong was chagrined, he gave no sign of it. He appeared more amused than anything else.

"I congratulate you, gentlemen," he said. "Perhaps you will be good enough to tell where you found the young lady."

"Right in her own apartment," said Burke.

"And we got the address from the phone book," said McMahon.

"Miss Campion," said Diphthong, facing the girl and speaking the name with a queer emphasis, "I assure you there is nothing for you to cry about. You are in no danger. I ask you as a favor to me to calm yourself while I tell you a little story. But first, gentlemen," he added, turning to Burke and McMahon, "do you know that Miss Campion's nickname is 'Dental Floss' — and do you know why?"

The detectives nodded in the affirmative.

"All right," Claude went on. "Here's the story. It seems there was a Swedish woman who had not been long in this country. She was homesick and one day she visited the post office, thinking perhaps some of her

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ski-jumping relatives might have written to her. Going up to the general delivery window she said: 'Ban there any mail for me?' The clerk said: 'What is your name, Madam?' And the Swedish woman replied: 'Face towels, you fool! Don't never call me Madam!' "

Even the stolid pair from headquarters had to laugh at this, but Diphthong checked their hilarity with a sharp command:

"Look at her!"

The girl's lips had parted in a broad smile of amusement, displaying a set of teeth that would have wrung a sigh of envy from a model in a tooth paste ad.

"We're out of luck, Burkey!" exclaimed McMahon. "It ain't 'Dental Floss' at all!"

"Your next move," said Diphthong, "is to apologize to the young lady and take off the handcuffs."

The two detectives obeyed sheepishly. The girl seated herself at the desk and after flashing another smile, this time a smile of thanks, at Diphthong, proposed a game of Bemis. It appeared that none of the four men present was familiar with the game, so "Miss Campion" held a piece of string out the window and pretended she was fishing.

Claude watched her a moment in silence; then he said:

"That isn't much fun, is it?"

"No," the girl admitted. "But what *can* we do?"

"I know a stunt that might serve to pass the time," said Gabriel Downey. "They did it at a house party a few nights ago. Somebody gives a word and somebody else is supposed to use it in a sentence, but it must be used in a novel way."

"That sounds swell!" the young woman cried. "Let's play it. You give me a word."

"All right," said Downey. "Take the word homicidal."

"Well," said the young woman after a pause, "I have an engagement to play in some tennis doubles this afternoon, but my partner is very weak and I don't see homicidal win."

"Bully boy!" Downey exclaimed. "Now, Burke, it's your turn. I give you the word vertigo."

"Tomorrow night is my night off," replied Burke promptly, "but I can't make up my mind vertigo."

"Bully boy!" Downey exclaimed for the second time. "Now some one give me a word."

"Take herculean," suggested McMahon.

"That's easy!" said Downey. "Once I was directing rehearsals in a show called *Yours Truly*, in which Leon Errol was the comedian. Errol spoke one of his lines and then waited as if expecting something to happen. Finally he asked me: 'What's the matter with Anastasia Reilly? Isn't this where she comes on?' 'No,' I replied. 'That's not herculean.' "

"I believe," Diphthong interrupted, "that the rest of your fascinating game ought to be postponed until we have apprehended the slayer of Gardner Lyle."

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"But it may take years," objected Burke.

"On the contrary," said Diphthong, "I know now who it is and he will be in this room in a very few minutes. Are you armed?"

"Always," said McMahon, opening his hand and displaying a cluster of prickly burrs.

"And me, too," said Burke, showing a pail of scalding hot water.

"I have my bugle," said Diphthong. "We must be on the alert, for we are dealing with a desperado."

He reached for the telephone.

"Hello, girlie," he said. "Will you please send up the house officer right away?"

"Surely," said Burke, "we can get along without him."

"I'm afraid not," Diphthong answered smilingly, and then, as a knock sounded at the door, "On guard, everybody! This may be our man!"

"Come in!" cried McMahon, and Lincoln H. Martingale stepped into the room.

Like a flash of lightning, Diphthong sprang at the man's legs, toppling him over, and, as he lay on the floor, deafened him with blasts on his bugle. Burke let fly with his handful of burrs, catching the prostrate house detective on the left coat-sleeve, while McMahon drenched him from head to foot with the now tepid water.

Downey noticed for the first time that Martingale was five feet eleven and a half inches tall, spoke through a megaphone, possessed a double chin and two goatees, was splay-footed, had distended nostrils, carried a package of sunflower seeds, wore bicycle clips, looked as if he were always getting his temperature taken, and lived in dread of ground moles.

"The man you described," he said to Diphthong.

"Yes," the latter replied. "Lincoln H. Martingale, alias Leonard K. Failing, recently in the partridge business in Pennsylvania! The man who robbed the poor widow in Mineral Wells, Texas, and the man who killed Gardner Lyle."

"You've got me dead to rights!" megaphoned Failing. "I wish you had kept out of this, Mr. Diphthong. I was safe so long as I only had to contend with McMahon and Burke."

"Well, you ain't safe now!" said McMahon angrily. "Come on, get up! You're going to take a ride!"

"Do you want to confess here or wait till you're at the station?" queried Burke.

"Confess what?"

"This murder!"

"What murder?"

"The murder of the man under the bed," said Burke.

With one accord, everyone in the room looked at the place where Lyle's body had lain. The body was gone!

"Gentlemen," said Failing. "There hasn't been any murder. Nobody is dead. As Mr. Diphthong no doubt has guessed, Mr. Lyle had sent out his shoes to be shined. The boy was slow about bringing them back, and Mr. Lyle dozed off. While you were engaged in that game of words, the boy

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returned with the shoes, Mr. Lyle put them on, and went out to keep his dinner engagement."

"Failing is speaking the truth," said Diphthong. "I have known all along that Lyle was alive."

"But what of that bullet hole through his head?" asked Downey, incredulously.

"Just a birthmark," replied his friend. "And now that we have cleared up this little problem, I move that we adjourn for breakfast."

Downey and the beautiful girl lingered a moment after the others were gone.

"Can't you and I have breakfast together, alone?" said the newspaperman.

"Yes," the girl murmured softly.

She realized that here was the story's love interest, and grew livid.

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A list of the regional libraries provided by the Library of Congress with books for the adult blind, in both Braille and "talking book" editions, can be had by writing to the Chief of the Division for the Blind, The Library of Congress, Washington 25, D. C.

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By the author of MR. ADAM *and* HOLD BACK THE NIGHT . . .

ON EDGE

by PAT FRANK

IT WAS A MISFORTUNE OF PLACE and time that brought Billy "the Owner" Trowbridge to the attention of Detective Lieutenant Brass, of Chicago's Fraud Squad, and Captain Posen, of the Broadway Squad, New York. He could have bumped noses with 10,000 other cops and been perfectly safe. But Brass had the squinted gray eyes of a huntsman, and missed nothing. Posen had a mind like a library of photographs. He never forgot a face — and the name, aliases and record that went with it.

For three days they had been attending a Washington crime conference. On the third day they ducked the afternoon session and started for the track at Bowie in Posen's car. A red light halted them at College Park, and it was there they spotted "the Owner."

Trowbridge did not look like a con man, but then if a con man looked like a con man he couldn't be a con man. He wore inconspicuous brown tweeds, clutched a grocery sack in each arm, and with his steel-rimmed spectacles bobbing uncertainly on the bridge of his thin nose, he might have been a minor government administrator, or a professor at the university. He crossed the highway with caution and apprehension. For an instant he stared at them, from a distance of ten feet, and then turned his face away. It was this quick move that Brass noticed.

"That's a wrong guy," Brass said. "I think I know him."

Posen eased the car ahead until he saw the profile. "That's Billy Trowbridge," he said. "Flimflam artist. Seven arrests, no convictions. Been out of circulation a long time. He's wanted in New York."

"Billy Trowbridge," said Brass. "We want him too."

"Well, do we tail him?"

Brass settled down in the seat, and sighed. "I haven't made the races in a year."

The light changed, and Posen idled along as if seeking a parking space. They watched Trowbridge get into a small car and prop his grocery bags against the seat. At a discreet distance, hugging the blind side of the road, they trailed the car through the suburb of Berwyn. It stopped before a white cottage, set alone and half hidden by trees. Trowbridge walked up the front steps, the door opened from within, and they glimpsed a flare of skirt. "He's got a woman," said Brass.

"I'll take the front," said Captain Posen. That was all he had to say. On a job like this he wouldn't want

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anybody better than Brass. They had met fifteen years before at an F.B.I. school, and there had been occasional business trips between the two cities since then, their business usually shackled to the left wrist. They regarded each other with respect and were rivals only in the sense that New York and Chicago are rivals.

Posen gave Brass time to get to the back of the house. Then he knocked and leaned his thick torso against the door, so that when the knob turned it flew open. Trowbridge jumped back. "Well," he said wearily, "it *is* you. I thought I saw you in College Park. Where's Brass?" In shirt sleeves now, he looked less trim than he had on the street.

"Okay, Brass," Posen called. Brass came through the kitchen door, pocketing a gun.

Posen looked at the living room — the comfortable chairs, the carefully blended colors, the deep bookcase. There was a woman beside the fireplace weeping quietly into her hands.

"This is my wife, Martha," said Trowbridge. "You'll have to pardon her. We always knew this could happen, but we'd begun to believe it wouldn't."

She said, her voice distorted, "Why couldn't you have waited? Why now?"

"In a few months," Trowbridge explained, "I'd have been safe. Statute of limitations. I'd have been safe in New York, and safe in Illinois."

Martha Trowbridge stopped crying suddenly, rubbed the tears from her face with the back of her hand, and said, "I'm all right now. Whatever it is you have to do, please do quickly. Gay will be back from school any minute. Gay's our little girl. She's in the first grade, and I don't want her to see this."

"You know how it is," Posen said. The woman was considerably younger than Trowbridge. He felt sorry for her.

"Of course. Please, quickly."

"We're ready. What do you want to take with you, Billy?"

"I'll pack a bag." He walked into the bedroom, and Brass and Posen followed him.

Trowbridge opened his shirt drawer. Posen asked, "Where've you been all this time, Billy?"

"Right here. For six years, right here. I've been clean."

"Working or hustling?"

"Working."

"At what?"

Trowbridge straightened and looked from the face of one detective to the face of the other. "I'm an assistant professor of economics at the university."

"I remember," said Posen. "You had a master's degree."

"I've been using it, for the first time."

"Too bad," said Posen. "Tell me the tale."

"It happened six years ago at Bowie," said Trowbridge, arranging the shirts in his suitcase, open on the bed. "You know my pitch?

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You know why they call me 'the Owner'?"

"Sure," said Posen. "You always wear an owner's badge at the track. Then you tell your mark you've got a horse in the next race, and the race is fixed, but you'll give him the winner — for a price."

"That's it," said Trowbridge. "But I always have three or four marks, and I give each of them the name of a different horse, and in addition to charging a flat fee, I make them place a bet for me. I only work one race a day, but I stand to make a killing. But on this day I stood to get killed."

"What happened?" asked Brass.

Trowbridge selected six conservative ties. "I picked two wrong marks. One of them was a hood from Denver — Knobby Nukells."

Brass nodded. "I know him. A tough hood."

"The other was a district attorney from Baltimore."

"That doesn't sound reasonable," said Posen. "Guys like that are too smart."

"Nobody's too smart when they hear my tale," said Trowbridge. "I don't know why it is, but everybody believes me."

Posen nodded. "He's right. He could con the gold out of Fort Knox."

"Anyway, I made a mistake," Trowbridge continued. "Usually I stayed behind the clubhouse while the racewas being run, but this race I watched from the rail because I'd made a small bet of my own. When the horses went to the post I found Knobby Nukells on one side of me and the district attorney on the other. This was very embarrassing, because naturally I'd given them different horses. I'll never forget their names; Bright Sun and Hogan's Pride. I thought I'd duck out while the race was being run, but before the barrier was sprung, Knobby Nukells grabbed me by the elbow and began telling me what he'd do to me if his horse lost. And the district attorney heard him, and sensed that something was funny, and began asking questions. So I was sunk."

"It didn't matter which horse won, you were finished," Posen said.

"That's right. I was finished."

"Well, which horse did win?" Brass demanded.

"Bright Sun and Hogan's Pride ran a dead heat," said Trowbridge. "Both Knobby Nukells and the district attorney were happy and satisfied and they both paid me off. After that, I knew my luck had run out. Besides, the baby was coming. So I quit hustling. I quit cold six years ago and I've been clean ever since."

Brass sat down on the bed and slapped his leg and laughed. "Billy," he said, "you sure can tell the tale!"

"You sure can," Posen said. "But lock up that bag and let's get going."

"Wait a minute," Brass said to Posen. "Who's going to get him?"

"I hadn't thought of that," said Posen. "There's an important complaint against him in New York."

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"It'll help me make captain, if I bring him home," said Brass.

"I think there's a reward for him in New York," said Posen.

"I wish you gentlemen would hurry up and decide before my kid comes home," said Trowbridge.

"Toss a coin, Billy," said Brass.

Trowbridge brought a quarter from his pocket and sent it spinning in the air. It bounced on the floor, rolled to the wall, rebounded, curled around a rug, and stopped, firmly and indisputably standing on edge.

The three men looked at it for a moment, but it did not quiver.

"We should have gone to the races in the first place," said Brass.

Posen shrugged.

"Billy," said Posen, "so far as I'm concerned, you can unpack."

"If we hurry," said Brass, "we can still make the third at Bowie."

Brass and Posen were going out of the door when the little girl came in.

"By golly," said Posen, "he does have a kid, doesn't he?"

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THE BURGLARS' CLUB

Hail a new department — THE BURGLARS' CLUB! *Stories sad and glad, serious and humorous, sentimental and satiric — but all of them about housebreakers, second-story men, gentlemen cracksmen — in a phrase, stories about scrambled yeggs . . .*

This month we inaugurate the department by giving you a double entry — two burglar yarns by two famous authors not usually associated with tales of nefarious prowlers in the night. The first is by Don Marquis who, to his own deep chagrin, realized that he might be "remembered longest for creating a cockroach character" — and who will ever forget archy and mehitabel? Don Marquis eventually came to writing by devious roads — schoolteacher, clerk, baler of hay, census taker, reporter, actor, and (the turning point) editor under the gentle wing of Joel Chandler Harris, creator of Uncle Remus. But even after Don Marquis found himself, he was not the happy man one would expect a noted humorist, a celebrated wit, to be. No, Don Marquis was at heart — as his close friend Christopher Morley knew so well — "an embittered cynic." Another close friend called Marquis "a born poet and bitter satirist."

You will understand the paradox of humor and bitterness after you have read Don Marquis's contribution to THE BURGLARS' CLUB . . .

THE IRON HAND IN THE VELVET GLOVE

by DON MARQUIS

THERE WAS THE CLICK OF AN electric-light switch, and almost before the sudden brilliance flooded the room the Burglar realized he had been trapped. He turned from the bureau drawer where he had been fumbling by the cautious, intermittent gleam of his pocket flash, and confronted a very determined lady with steady, cool gray eyes.

Her left hand was holding a beautiful flowered dressing gown over her bosom, her right hand was pointing at him a small pearl-handled revolver. He stared at the revolver as if he knew it; and then he stared at the

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lady, and gulped, with a perceptible movement of his Adam's apple. The revolver was a silly-looking little weapon, but there was nothing silly in the attitude of the handsome woman who pointed it. She was not at all nervous nor hysterical, nor even excited.

"Put your hands up over your head," said she.

The Burglar did so. There was something in his manner which indicated that he might have obeyed the lady even if she had not been pointing the pretty little pistol at him.

"I suppose you have a gun," she said.

The Burglar moved his head from side to side with a negative motion, without speaking.

"I thought all burglars carried guns," said the lady severely. "How does it happen that you don't carry a gun?"

Her manner implied criticism of his efficiency as a burglar; it was easy to see that already she rated him as a second- or third-class burglar; possibly even a fourth- or fifth-class burglar.

"Sit down in that chair there," continued the handsome lady, "but keep your hands over your head. I don't believe for one minute that you haven't got a gun. A man who would break into an apartment to steal would think nothing of telling a lie! And take that mask off."

The Burglar sat down in the chair which she indicated, but he did not take the mask off at once. He continued to hold his hands above his head.

"Why don't you take the mask off," said the lady, "as I told you to?"

"Because," mumbled the Burglar, with irrefutable logic, "I can't take the mask off and at the same time keep my hands over my head, can I?"

There was something about the Burglar's voice which seemed to startle the lady. She said nothing for the moment, but stared at the mask. She stared at it in every condemnatory sort of way. It was evident that there was something about this particular mask which displeased her greatly. It was an irregular slice of black silk and the right eyehole was twice as large as the left one. There was no symmetry about it. Moreover, it was tied to the Burglar's head in a very unsymmetrical fashion. The general effect was one of untidiness, even of uncouthness.

"I should think," said the lady severely, "that even a burglar would care more about his appearance than to wear a thing like that!"

The man in the chair mumbled something inarticulate; inarticulate, but apologetic.

"Of course," went on the lady, "the moral disintegration which would result in a man becoming a criminal would also make him untidy in his habits. Or, more likely, your downfall started with untidiness."

There was another apologetic mumble from the Burglar.

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"You may let the left hand down far enough to remove the mask," said the lady, "but keep your right hand up in the air, and put your left hand up in the air again as soon as you have removed the mask."

The Burglar dejectedly performed this maneuver; dejectedly, but promptly.

"William!" said the handsome lady when his face came into view.

"Yes, Miranda," said the Burglar meekly, "it's me!"

There was a half minute's silence. Miranda recovered herself first. She said severely: "William, do not say, 'It's *me*.' Say, 'It is *I*!' "

William, the Burglar, who had permitted his hands to drop into his lap and was now nervously drawing the mask between his fingers, mildly repeated after her: "It is I."

"How long have you been a burglar?" asked Miranda. "And what brought you down to this?"

"I have been a criminal about two years, Miranda," said William, "and I don't know that I can tell you just exactly what it was that started me on the downward path. I think it was a combination of things, Miranda. I think it started with smoking cigarettes in bed."

A look of sad satisfaction passed over the severe lady's handsome face.

"I told you twelve years ago," she said, "that any man who persisted in smoking cigarettes in bed was taking his first step toward a complete mental and moral dissolution."

"Yes, Miranda," said William, "you used to tell me that pretty often."

"You never heeded what I told you," said she, "*never*, at any time, during the five years that we were married! You used to scatter ashes and burn holes everywhere — always!"

"Not always," protested William feebly.

"*Always!*" said his former wife firmly. "And now look at you — a burglar! Carelessness and untidiness and disorder and neglect led you into Vice, and Vice has led you into Crime!"

She put her pistol under the pillow again, and tacitly gave up the idea of searching him for a gun. Both silently acknowledged that there was no question of either one shooting the other. There had never been any physical violence during their married life; only a vast temperamental disagreement.

"I don't suppose you are really any more successful as a burglar than you were as a stock broker," she went on.

"You seem to have done pretty well, Miranda," countered the Burglar, with a glance at the evidence of luxury in the room. "This apartment, here on Park Avenue, must cost you many thousands a year."

"After you deserted me — *abandoned* me," she said, with an indignant stress upon the word, "I divorced you. And then I married again. Mr. Robinson, who manufactured bronchial lozenges. He died last year."

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"Yes, I heard," said William. "And they are very good lozenges, too. I often take them when I am out on raw, damp nights. And I often think of you, Miranda, when I take them."

There was a note of reminiscent sentiment in the Burglar's voice as he uttered the last sentence; a note almost of tenderness. Miranda's cool steady gaze softened for an instant. And then she swiftly armored herself once more against his appeal, and said sternly:

"William Henry Brown, *why* did you *abandon* me? In another year I should have completely regenerated your character, toughened your moral fibre, made a model citizen out of you!"

The Burglar was silent a moment. Then he said: "Miranda, what did Mr. Robinson die of?"

"I don't know," said Miranda, a puzzled look coming into her handsome face. "The doctors said he took too many of his own lozenges, but I never agreed with them. He was improving so in *every* way! He had given up tobacco and alcoholic beverages and profanity; I had got him to understand that coffee and tea were bad for him, and his habits were *marvelously* improved! He had taken up Ethical Culture and Sociology and home exercises, and he had given up a number of his rougher companions who were having a bad influence on his health and morals. He went with me three nights a week to lectures, and he seemed to me to be gaining a real enthusiasm for the cause of uplifting the moral condition of the masses — something *you* never even pretended to, William. He got so that he straightened out rugs almost automatically, without being reminded, when he came into a room; and he promised me that he was going to give up pocket billiards at his club, on account of the gambling element. And then," she concluded sadly, dabbing neatly at her eyes with a dainty bit of lace, "he died!"

"Poor Mr. Robinson," said the Burglar ambiguously.

"And you," she said accusingly, "have become a *criminal!* I always told you that you would, if my influence were removed from you."

"I think," said William meekly, "that's where I got the idea, after I failed in business. You used to tell me so often, Miranda!"

She gave him a startled look. "Am *I* responsible for your downfall?" She frowned and considered. Her thoughts must have reassured her, for she brightened again, and smiled. "No," she said, "that's just one of your jokes — you were *always* joking, William!" She looked winsome as well as handsome when she permitted herself to smile. He remembered that she had not always been severe; he smiled back at her. "Levity," she said, "untimely levity has been one cause of your depravity, William. I could never get it out of you!"

She sighed, but now her manner was one of agreeable, whimsical, maternal, chiding indulgence. It had

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often been that way, William reflected. It had been that way when he had first fallen in love with her; he had been won by it; he had not realized there was an iron hand inside that velvet glove.

"Let me see that bag!" she demanded. He handed over the small suitcase, resembling a physician's bag, in which he carried the tools of his trade.

"What's that, William?" she asked.

"It's called a jimmy," said William. "It's used to force doors and windows with."

"I heard you getting in," said Miranda, "that's why I was ready for you. Why did you make so much noise?"

"Well," he said apologetically, "it isn't really the right jimmy for a door like yours. And the skeleton key wouldn't work."

"Of course not," she said, picking it up. "It's all *rusty*. And so is your jimmy. But *you* wouldn't take care of your tools! Not you! Did you ever know where a hammer or a chisel or an ice pick was — or put them back into their right places again after you'd used them?"

Her manner was still agreeable — it was almost warm.

"No, Miranda," he said.

"And what's this bottle, with the dirty rag around it?"

"That's not a dirty rag," said William. "That's a clean handkerchief!"

"Clean!" She held it up in horror, and pointed to one or two infinitesimal stains. "Clean!" She laughed at him. "*You'd* think it was clean! But what is it for?"

"That bottle has chloroform in it," he said, "and sometimes —"

"Heavens!" she cried. "You don't mean to tell me that you drench *that* rag with chloroform and put it over people's faces! William Henry Brown, would you have put that over *my* face?"

The Burglar hesitated, and a fit of coughing seized him; which he checked with one of Robinson's Bronchial Lozenges. But she did not allow him to evade an answer.

"I wouldn't have put it over *your* face, Miranda," he said finally, "after I'd seen whose face it was."

She looked at him almost tenderly. She looked at him consideringly, and for a long, long moment.

"William," she said at last, "I failed with you. It was my own fault. I was young. I had not had the experience that I had later with dear Mr. Robinson. I was not patient enough. I was not thorough enough. I failed in my work of reformation." She sighed, then continued: "I owe you another chance. I owe it to you as a duty to take up the work where I left it off. There is good in you, William, great potentiality for good. You must have your chance in life — in this life and the life to come!"

"Oh, Miranda," he began. But she interrupted him.

"Don't say a word, William," she commanded. "I failed in my task of uplift and reform because I was not firm enough with you!"

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"But, Miranda," said the Burglar, a gentle cool perspiration breaking out all over him, "haven't you really been happier since I ran away?"

"What," said she, fervently, "is my happiness, my transitory and self-indulgent happiness, by the side of my duty — my clear duty to sacrifice everything else to the completion of my neglected work of regenerating a human being?"

"Yes, Miranda," said the Burglar, slumping dejectedly in his chair.

"I shall marry you again tomorrow morning," said Mrs. Robinson, "and take up the work anew!"

"It's leap year," commented Mr. Brown, with a feeble effort to be amusing.

"Don't be facetious, William," said Miranda. "That silly leap-year custom has nothing whatever to do with this matter. I should marry you again tomorrow morning whether the figures of the current year were equally divisible by four or not — it is a duty I owe to you! You may kiss me!"

"Yes, Miranda," said William. He sighed, but he performed that duty with something more than a perfunctory manner — for, flushed with the fervor of her ideas, Miranda was a *very* handsome woman. And she responded warmly. There was art, there was design, in his ardor, however.

"Miranda, dear," he said, "I know it's not the proper time of day to eat — but I'm hungry! I wonder —"

She considered. Then, with her more indulgent manner, she said: "I suppose, if I don't get you something, you'll be burglarizing the refrigerator."

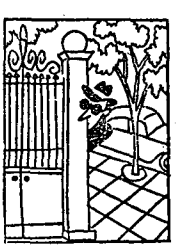
She started out, but paused in the doorway to say: "But mind — you mustn't get any crumbs on the floor!"

"I won't, Miranda," he said.

But when she was gone he stepped to the telephone and called up the switchboard in the lobby of the apartment building.

"Listen," he said in a low tone to the sleepy operator. "This is apartment G-12 calling. Send for a cop quick! There's a burglar here. Yes, I'll hold him till you get a cop!"

And three minutes later, as he gave himself up to the puzzled officer at the elevator door, he murmured to himself: "This may mean seven years — but that's better than a life sentence!"



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Our second tale of THE BURGLARS' CLUB *is also by a famous American humorist — but oh how different! Like Don Marquis, Ellis Parker Butler ultimately came to writing after having traveled various paths — bill-clerk, salesman, and trade-paper editor. But Ellis Parker Butler, from the evidence available, was not the frustrated, bitter, disturbed person Don Marquis was. Mr. Butler made his peace with the world. After the sensational success of his best-known story, "Pigs Is Pigs," Ellis Parker Butler could find relaxation from his work in civic matters, trout fishing, and stamp collecting . . . which explains why the Butler humor is so different from the Marquis . . .*

THE SILVER PROTECTOR

by ELLIS PARKER BUTLER

WHEN OUR NEW SUBURBAN house was completed, I took Sarah out to see it, and she liked it all but the stairs.

"Edgar," she said, when she had ascended to the second floor, "I don't know whether it is imagination or not, but it seems to me that these stairs are funny, some way. I can't understand it. They are not a long flight, and they are not unusually steep, but they seem to be unusually wearying. I never knew a short flight to tire me so, and I have climbed many flights in the six years we have lived in apartments."

"Perhaps, Sarah," I said, with mild dissimulation, "you are unusually tired today."

The fact was that I had planned those stairs myself, and for a particular reason I had made the rise of each step three inches more than the customary height, and in this way I had saved two steps. I had also made the tread of the steps unusually narrow; and the reason was that I had found, from long experience, that stair carpet wears first on the tread of the steps, where the foot falls. By making the steps tall enough to save two, and by making the tread narrow, I reduced the wear on the carpet to a minimum. I believe in economy where it is possible. For the same reason I had the stair banisters made wide, with a saddle-like top to the newel post, to tempt my son and daughter to slide downstairs. The less they used the stairs, the longer the carpet would last.

I need hardly say that Sarah has a fear of burglars; most women have. As for myself, I prefer not to meet a burglar. It is all very well to get up

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in the night and prowl about with a pistol in one hand, seeking to eliminate the life of a burglar, and some men may like it; but I am of a very excitable nature, and I am sure that if I did find a burglar and succeeded in shooting him, I should be in such an excited state that I could not sleep again that night — and no man can afford to lose his night's rest.

There are other objections to shooting a burglar in the house, and these objections apply with double force when the house and its furnishings are entirely new. Although some of the rugs in our house were red, not all of them were; and I had no guarantee that if I shot a burglar he would lie down on a red rug and bleed to death. A burglar does not consider one's feelings, and would be quite as apt to bleed on a green rug, and spoil it, as not. Until burglarizing is properly regulated and burglars are educated, as they should be, in technical burglary schools, we cannot hope that a shot burglar will staunch his wound until he can find a red rug to lie down on.

And there are still other objections to shooting a burglar. If all burglars were fat, one of these would be removed; but perhaps a thin burglar might get in front of my revolver, and in that case the bullet would be likely to go right through him and continue on its way, and perhaps break a mirror or a cut-glass dish. I am a thin man myself, and if a burglar shot at me he might damage some of our things in the same way.

I thought all these things over when we decided to build in the suburbs, for Sarah is very nervous about burglars, and makes me get up at the slightest noise and go poking about. Only the fact that no burglar had ever entered our apartment at night had prevented what might have been a serious accident to a burglar, for I made it a rule, when Sarah wakened me on such occasions, to waste no time, but to go through the rooms as hastily as possible and get back to bed; and at the speed I traveled I might have bumped into a burglar in the dark and knocked him over, and his head might have struck some hard object, causing concussion of the brain; and as a burglar has a small brain, a small amount of concussion might have ruined it entirely. But as I am a slight man it might have been my brain that got concussed. A father of a family has to think of these things.

The nervousness of Sarah regarding burglars had led me in this way to study the subject carefully, and my adoption of jet-black pajamas as nightwear was not due to cowardice on my part. I properly reasoned that if a burglar tried to shoot me while I was rushing around the house after him in the darkness, a suit of black pajamas would somewhat spoil his aim, and, not being able to see me, he would not shoot at all. In this way I should save Sarah the nerve shock that would follow the explosion of a pistol in the house. For Sarah was

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very much more afraid of pistols than of burglars. I am sure there were only two reasons why I had never killed a burglar with a pistol: one was that no burglar had ever entered our apartment, and the other was that I never had a pistol.

But I knew that one is much less protected in a suburb than in the city, and when I decided to build I studied the burglar protection matter most carefully. I said nothing to Sarah about it, for fear it would upset her nerves, but for months I considered every method that seemed to have any merit, and that would avoid getting a burglar's blood — or mine — spattered around on our new furnishings. I desired some method by which I could finish up a burglar properly without having to leave my bed, for although Sarah is brave enough in sending me out of bed to catch a burglar, I knew she must suffer severe nerve strain during the time I was wandering about in the dark. Her objection to explosives had also to be considered, and I really had to exercise my brain more than common before I hit upon what I may now consider the only perfect method of handling burglars.

Several things coincided to suggest my method. One of these was Sarah's foolish notion that our silver must, every night, be brought from the dining-room and deposited under our bed. This I considered a most foolhardy tempting of fate. It coaxed any burglar who ordinarily would have quietly taken the silver from the dining-room, and have then gone away peacefully, to enter our room. The knowledge that I lay in bed ready at any time to spring out upon him would make him prepare his revolver, and his nervousness might make him shoot me, which would quite upset Sarah's nerves. I told Sarah so, but she had a hereditary instinct for bringing the silver to the bedroom, and insisted. I saw that in the suburban house this would be continued as "bringing the silver upstairs," and a trial of my carpet-saving stairs suggested to me my burglar-defeating plan. I had the apparatus built into the house, and I had the house planned to accommodate the apparatus.

For several months after we moved into the house I had no burglars, but I felt no fear of them in any event. I was prepared for them.

In order not to make Sarah nervous, I explained to her that my invention of a silver-elevator was merely a time-saving device. From the top of the dining-room sideboard I ran upright tracks through the ceiling to the back of the hall above, and in these I placed a glass case which could be run up and down the tracks like a dumbwaiter. All our servant had to do when she had washed the silver was to put it in the glass case, and I had attached to the top of the case a stout steel cable which ran to the ceiling of the hall above, over a pulley, and so to our bedroom, which was at the front of the hall upstairs. By this

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by means I could, when I was in bed, pull the cable, and the glass case of silver would rise to the second floor. Our bedroom door opened upon the hall, and from the bed I could see the glass case; but in order that I might be sure that the silver was there I put a small electric light in the case and kept it burning all night.

Sarah was delighted with this arrangement, for in the morning all I had to do was to play out the steel cable and the silver would descend to the dining-room, and the maid could have the table all set by the time breakfast was ready. Not once did Sarah have a suspicion that all this was not merely a household economy, but my burglar trap.

On the sixth of August, at 2 o'clock in the morning, Sarah awakened me, and I immediately sat straight up in bed. There was an undoubtable noise of sawing, and I knew at once that a burglar was entering our home. Sarah was trembling, and I knew she was getting nervous.

"Sarah," I said, in a whisper, "be calm! There is not the least danger. I have been expecting this for some time, and I only hope the burglar has no dependent family or poor old mother to support. Whatever happens, be calm and keep perfectly quiet."

With that I released the steel cable from the head of my bed and let the glass case full of silver slide noiselessly to the sideboard.

"Edgar!" whispered Sarah in agonized tones, "are you *giving* him our silver?"

"Sarah!" I whispered sternly, "remember what I have just said. Be calm and keep perfectly quiet." And I would say no more.

In a very short time I heard the window below us open softly, and I knew the burglar was entering the parlor from the side porch. I counted twenty, which I had figured would be the time required for him to reach the dining-room, and then, when I was sure he must have seen the silver shining in the glass case, I slowly pulled on the steel cable and raised case and silver to the hall above. Sarah began to whisper to me, but I silenced her.

What I had expected happened. The burglar, seeing the silver rise through the ceiling, left the dining-room and went into the hall. There, from the foot of the stairs, he could see the case glowing in the hall above, and without hesitation he mounted the stairs. As he reached the top I had a good view of him, for he was silhouetted against the light that glowed from the silver case. He was a most brutal looking fellow of the prizefighting type, but I almost laughed aloud when I saw his build. He was short and chunky. As he stepped forward to grasp the silver case, I let the steel cable run through my fingers, and the case and its precious contents slid noiselessly down to the dining-room. For only one instant the burglar seemed discon-

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certed, then he turned and ran downstairs again.

This time I did not wait so long to draw up the silver. I hardly gave him time to reach the dining-room door before I jerked the cable, and the case was glowing in the upper hall. The burglar immediately stopped, turned, and mounted the stairs, but just as he reached the top I let the silver slide down again, and he had to turn and descend. Hardly had he reached the bottom step before I had the silver once more in the upper hall.

The burglar was a gritty fellow and was not to be so easily defeated. With some word which I could not catch, but which I have no doubt was profane, or at least vulgar, he dashed up the stairs, and just as his hand touched the case I let the silver drop to the dining-room. I smiled as I saw his next move. He carefully removed his coat and vest, rolled up his sleeves, and took off his collar. This evidently meant that he intended to get the silver if it took the whole night, and nothing could have pleased me more. I lay in my comfortable bed fairly shaking with suppressed laughter, and had to stuff a corner of a pillow in my mouth to smother the sound of my mirth. I did not allow the least pity for the fellow to weaken my nerve.

A low, long screech from the hall told me that I had a man of uncommon brain to contend with, for I knew the sound came from his hands drawing along the banister, and that to husband his strength and to save time, he was now sliding down. But this did not disconcert me. It pleased me. *The quicker he went down, the oftener he would have to walk up.*

For half an hour I played with him, giving him just time to get down to the foot of the stairs before I raised the silver, and just time to reach the top before I lowered it, and then I grew tired of the sport — for it was nothing else to me — and decided to finish him off. I was getting sleepy, but it was evident that the burglar was not, and I was a little afraid I might fall asleep and thus defeat myself. The burglar had that advantage because he was used to night work. So I quickened my movements a little. When the burglar slid down I gave him just time to see the silver rise through the ceiling, and when he climbed the stairs I only allowed him to see it descend through the floor. In this way I made him double his pace, and as I quickened my movements I soon had him dashing up the stairs and sliding down again as if for a wager. I did not give him a moment for rest, and he was soon panting terribly and beginning to stumble; but with almost superhuman nerve he kept up the chase. He was an unusually tough burglar.

But quick as he was I was always quicker, and a glimpse of the glowing case was all I let him have at either end of his climb or slide. No sooner was he down than it was up, and no

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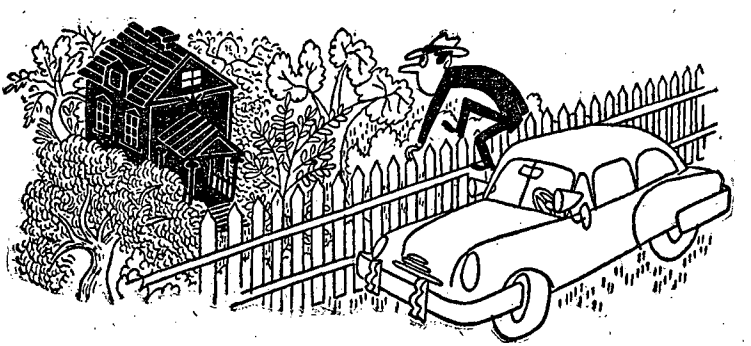
sooner was the case up than he was after it. In this way I kept increasing his speed until it was something terrific, and the whole house shook. But still his speed increased. I saw then that I had brought him to the place I had prepared for, where he had but one object in life, and that was to beat the case up or downstairs; and as I was now so sleepy I could hardy keep my eyes open, I did what I had intended to do from the first. I lowered the case until it was exactly *halfway* between the ceiling of the dining-room and the floor of the hall above — and turned out the electric light. I then tied the steel cable securely to the head of my bed, turned over, and went to sleep, lulled by the shaking of the house as the burglar dashed up and down the stairs.

Just how long this continued I do not know, for my sleep was deep and dreamless, but I should judge that the burglar ran himself to death sometime between half-past 3 and a quarter after 4. So great had been his efforts that when I went to remove him I did not recognize him at all. When I had last seen him in the glow of the glass silver case he had been a stout, chunky fellow, and now his remains were those of an emaciated man. He must have run off one hundred and twenty pounds of flesh before he gave out.

Only one thing clouded my triumph. Our silver consisted of but half a dozen each of knives, forks, and spoons, a butter knife, and a sugar spoon, all plated, and worth probably ten dollars, and to save this I had made the burglar wear to rags a Wilton stair carpet worth fifty-nine dollars. But I have now corrected this. I have bought one hundred and fifty dollars' worth of silver.



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A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER OF EQMM

Ellery Queen's first book, THE ROMAN HAT MYSTERY, *was published on August 16, 1929. Ellery Queen's 80th book (including novels, volumes of short stories, critical and bibliographic works, anthologies, juveniles, and books edited by EQ) will be published on August 16, 1954 — the 25th anniversary, to the day, of Queen's debut in print. The 80th book is Ellery Queen's 28th novel,* THE GLASS VILLAGE.

Now, we would like very much to pay a personal tribute to the two men with whom we have been so closely associated these past thirteen years; but the Queens themselves have warned us that they will blue-pencil anything we write except the barest statements of fact — "no gush," they said, "no bouquets, and no rhetoric." So you will have to read between the lines to know what we think of EQ. We can tell you, however, that Little, Brown & Company, publishers of Ellery Queen's hard-cover books, are preparing a special brochure of tributes to Queen from authors, critics, editors, and famous fans all over the world. We wish it were possible for us to send a copy of this Silver Anniversary Tribute to every reader of EQMM, but since this cannot be arranged we have planned another way for EQMM to participate in the 25th anniversary. It is a way that we hope meets with your approval. We simply asked EQ the author to write two new stories for EQ the editor, and then we asked EQ the editor to publish the stories in July and August as EQMM's way of celebrating the Queens' Silver Anniversary. So, here is the first of two new adventures in detection, written especially for the readers of EQ's own magazine.

And to the Queens themselves (before either of them can wield a blue pencil) our heartiest congratulations — and long may they flourish!

— JOSEPH W. FERMAN

GI STORY

by ELLERY QUEEN

ELLERY STAGGERED OFF THE ATLANTIC State Express in his favorite small town under a safari load of guns, fishing tackle, and sporty luggage, resolved that this time nothing should thwart his summer holiday. But he had hardly dumped his gear when he was called to the phone. Sure

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enough, it was Wrightsville's chief of police, with a crime.

"I haven't even taken my hat off," Ellery complained. "What do your criminals do, Dakin, watch the Arrivals column in the *Record?*"

"This one's real unorthodox," said Chief Dakin. "Can I send a car right up?"

The lean old Yank was steaming fretfully on State Street at the side entrance to the County Court House. He pulled himself into the police car with one hand and groped for Ellery with the other.

"I've been up most of the night," croaked Dakin. "Remember Clint Fosdick?"

"Sure. Household Fixtures. Slocum near Upper Whistling. What's old Clint done?"

"Got himself murdered last night," said Dakin, reaching for his soggy polka-dot bandanna, "and I can tell you who did it, only I'm not goin' to. I want *you* to tell *me.*"

Ellery stared at the author of this extraordinary statement as the car panted across the sizzling Square and began to creep up Dade Street. "Why? Aren't you sure?"

"I wish I was as sure of a pew in Heaven," cried Chief Dakin. "I'm not only sure who murdered Clint, I know *how* he murdered Clint, and what's more I've got him dead to rights with the evidence to convict."

"Then what's the problem, Dakin?"

"GI," said the chief of police.

"G-what?"

"GI. Do those two letters mean anything to you, Mr. Queen?"

"Well, of course —"

"The only trouble is, it don't fit with my evidence," said Dakin. "And if I can't make it fit with my evidence, a smart lawyer might fuddle a jury with it just enough to put a reasonable doubt in their minds. So you listen to the facts without prejudice, Mr. Queen," the chief said grimly, "and you make that GI fit. Remember the Smith boys — the brothers we've always called the Presidents?"

"Smith? Presidents?" Ellery looked bewildered.

"Their dad was Jeff Smith — Thomas Jefferson Smith — taught American history at Wrightsville High. Jeff married Martha Higgins and they had three sons. Wash, the eldest, was in the war and he's a lawyer now, when he works at it. Linc was in the service, too, then he went to medical school — he's just finishin' his internship at Wrightsville General. And Woodie, the youngest, went into the Army three months back.

"Well, Clint Fosdick was sweet on Martha Higgins since 'way before she married Jeff Smith. Only Clint was eighteen years older than Martha, he'd never got past fourth grade in school — never even learned to write Spencerian, just printed his letters — and with Jeff, a college man, in the picture Clint didn't stand a chance.

"But in '37, when Jeff Smith drowned in Quetonokis Lake while he was counselin' at a boys' summer camp, Martha found herself a penni-

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less widow with three hungry boys to rear, and there was old faithful Clint, still waitin' . . . Well, Martha married him," growled Dakin, "and Clint bought that big house on Hill Drive — the one with those hundred-and-twenty-year-old shade trees — for them all to live in like he was standin' treat for the ice cream at a Sunday School picnic."

And the chief's Adam's apple jiggled as the old police car groped for the top of the ridge and began to labor along Hill Drive, between the tombs of Wrightsville's fine old mansions.

"Clint did everything for those boys. He sent 'em to college in style. Gave 'em their own cars, pockets full of allowance money. . . When Martha died in the flu epidemic durin' the war, Clint became father *and* mother to them. He couldn't do enough.

"And you'd have said they reciprocated. They called him dad. They always remembered his birthday and Father's Day and Christmas. Brought their problems to him — real pal stuff. Young Woodie, the one just went in the Army, ran wild as Ivor Crosby's Ayrshire bull for a while, but Clint kept sayin' he'd spoiled the boy; and it's a fact they were mighty close. Linc — the doctor — he's always been kind of studious and intense; Clint swore no man had a finer son. As for Wash, the eldest, he was the easy-goin' sort — too easy-goin' for this world, Clint used to say; he had to bail Wash out of trouble every other Saturday night, a poker debt or a Low Village girl or somethin'; but Clint claimed there wasn't a mean bone in Wash's body.

"Well, he was wrong about one of them," said the old police chief, glaring at Ellery, "because one of 'em's poisoned him, and I'll see the murderin' chuck sizzle like pork sausage in a dirty fryin' pan — if you'll tell me what GI means, Mr. Queen!"

"Glad to," said Ellery patiently, "if you'll only explain —"

But they were drawing up before the simmering Fosdick lawns, and Dakin fell silent. In the stained-glass vestibule they shook the dust from their shoes, and then the police chief led the way through the merciful gloom of the broad entrance hall past one of his young officers to Clint Fosdick's library.

"This is where Clint's housekeeper, Lettie Dowling, found him last night when she heard a chair crash and ran in."

It was a wonderful old high-ceilinged, oak-paneled, darkish-cool room, but Ellery found its present musty silence dispiriting. He saw at once where the body must have been lying — the leather-backed swivel chair behind the desk had fallen over on its side, and the Oriental rug beneath was badly wrinkled, as if it had been clawed in agony.

In a litter of papers on the desk lay an overturned cocktail glass. On a tray nearby stood a pitcher half full of an almost colorless liquid. Ellery

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stooped over the pitcher, sniffing. "Yep, he got it in the cocktail," nodded Chief Dakin. "Clint used to be a teetotaler, like me, but when Martha died he developed a hankerin' for martinis. He'd sit here in his library nights when he'd get to feelin' lonely for her, gulpin' 'em down."

"Who mixed this?" asked Ellery sharply.

"That won't tell you anything. Clint did it himself. I'll cut some corners for you," said Dakin in a deadly voice. "The housekeeper, old Lettie, has her room just off the kitchen. Yesterday mornin', early — quarter past 6 — Lettie, who's got the miseries and 'd had a bad night in the heat, got out of bed for some aspirins. She heard clinky sounds from the pantry, where the liquor's kept, and she opened her door a crack. There was an almost full bottle of gin that Wash had brought home for Clint on Wednesday night, and through the open kitchen door Lettie saw one of the brothers monkeyin' with it. He had a little kind of medicine bottle, she says, in his hand. She saw his face plain.

"Then she heard Clint's voice. Clint was comin' down to the kitchen for his mornin' coffee — earlier than usual, but he knew Lettie was sick. She heard Clint ask the boy what he was doin', and the boy mumble somethin' and go back upstairs. But Lettie'd seen him put the gin bottle back quick when he'd heard Clint comin' and jam the medicine bottle — empty, she says — in the pocket of his bathrobe. And, Mr. Queen, I've got that 'medicine' bottle. Dug it out of the garbage pit in the back yard late last night where it wouldn't have been if the garbage truck had come yesterday afternoon like it was scheduled to, only it had brake trouble and was held up. That bottle contained poison — if it was full, the way Lettie says it was, there was enough to wipe out half of High Village. And it's the same poison, the Connhaven lab says, that's in the bottle of gin. Besides, *his prints are on the poison bottle.* I've got the devil cold."

"Except, apparently," said Ellery, "for GI. Which is —?"

Chief Dakin carefully removed an uncreased sheet of paper from his pocket. "Clint was makin' out his monthly store bills when he swallowed that cocktail. He must have known right off he was a goner; it's quick-actin' stuff. And the minute he realized he was poisoned he must have known who'd done it. He probably saw the same thing yesterday mornin' that Lettie saw when he was kitchen-bound for his coffee. It must have puzzled him at the time, but what he'd seen told him the answer in a flash when he felt what he'd swallowed. So before he died Clint got hold of his ballpoint pen and wrote on this letterhead in that schoolboy printin' style of his. Then he fell over with the chair and all, and died on the floor like a poisoned dog."

"GI?" Ellery reached.

Chief Dakin handed Ellery the paper.

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It was an ordinary business billhead. Below the *Clint Fosdick, Household Fixtures, High Village, Terms: 30 Days* inscription appeared in shaky handprinting the two letters:

GI

"GI," Ellery repeated. "And they've all been in the Army, you say?"

"That's right."

"And they were all home yesterday morning?"

"Linc's had a few days off from the hospital. Young Woodie's on leave from Camp Hale. Wash lives here all the time."

Ellery was silent, staring at Clint Fosdick's dying message. Then he said, "Does the guilty one know he's tagged for frying?"

"No. Lettie's told nobody but me what she saw, and I haven't let on because of this piece of paper. I've just made out like all three brothers are under suspicion."

"Well," said Ellery. "Could we have the — what did you call them, Dakin? — the Presidents in for a chat?"

The three tall pale young men brought in by their guards were badly in need of sleep and shaves. Their brotherhood was plain from their dark coloring, deep brown eyes, and the way they huddled.

One, a baby-faced variant of the other two in a rumpled U. S. Army uniform, would be Private Woodie Smith. Private Smith's brown eyes masked fear and confusion; his boyish lips quivered.

The second had the keen red-rimmed look of hospitals, and hands so scrubbed they looked bleached — obviously the intern, Dr. Linc Smith. He was gaunt and sharpened down and very quiet. He had been, Ellery would have sworn, crying.

So the third was the lawyer-brother Wash — Wash the easy-going, with a heavying gray face and a softened body. Wash Smith stood there weakly smiling, like a professional comedian caught in a tragedy and trying desperately to think of a joke.

"GI," murmured Ellery. "That's what your stepfather wrote down, Private Smith, and what does it suggest to you?"

"What am I supposed to do," whispered the boy in uniform, "confess because he wrote down GI? I wouldn't kill Dad — why would I kill Dad?"

"Why would Private Smith kill Dad, Dakin?" asked Ellery.

Dakin said in an exhausted voice, "Because he might not want to wait for Clint to die natural so he could collect his one-third of Clint's estate that's willed to the three Smith boys."

"Let me alone!" shrieked the boy.

"Woodie," said his brother Linc gently.

"GI," said Ellery. "Comes into your field in a way, doesn't it, Dr. Smith? GI — gastrointestinal?"

The young intern's fatigued eyes widened. "Are you serious? Of course.

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You can hardly study internal medicine without covering gastroenterology. I even treated Dad Clint for gastrointestinal flu last spring, at his insistence, although if the Medical Board found out. . . . And naturally I have access to any amount of poison. The only thing is, I didn't poison him."

"But the GI, Dr. Smith?" Ellery insisted.

The intern shrugged. "If Dad had thought I'd poisoned him, he'd have written my name. That would make sense. GI doesn't. Not to me, anyway."

"Or to me," cried Wash Smith, as if he could not wait.

Ellery glanced at the lawyer-brother. "Gin begins with the letters GI. And it was the bottle of gin that was poisoned, Mr. Smith — a bottle I understand *you* brought home for Mr. Fosdick."

"Well, sure, he asked me to," said the eldest brother in a sort of torment. "But what kind of way is that to identify somebody? Linc's right. Whoever Clint thought had poisoned him, wouldn't he have written down the name?"

Ellery smiled ruefully; he had been chewing on that one for some time. Chief Dakin's face told nothing.

And suddenly Ellery stopped smiling, as if he had recognized the taste in his mouth. "Presidents," he said. "Presidents! Your blood-father, I'm told, gentlemen, was named after President Thomas Jefferson. And he named his sons after Presidents, too?"

"Why, yes," said Wash Smith blankly. "After the three Presidents he always maintained were the greatest. I was named after Washington."

"After Lincoln," said Dr. Linc Smith.

"After Woodrow Wilson," quavered Private Woodie Smith.

And all three said in one voice, "Why?"

But all Ellery replied was, "Thank you. Would you mind stepping out of the room?" It was only when their guards had herded the three Smiths out that Ellery said to Dakin, "Now I can tell you whom old Clint was accusing of murder."

"I'm listening," said Chief Dakin.

Ellery was looking at the fallen chair as if the old man who had toppled it were still with them, gripping a pen and trying to push it along a billhead.

"Dr. Smith is right," Ellery said. "Fancy verbal acrobatics are the pleasant preoccupations of detective fiction. In real life they don't happen. A man who will perform the miracle of forcing his dying brain and muscles to commit a message to paper is not trying to be subtle or clever. If he knows who did the job on him his efforts can have only one purpose: to transmit that information as directly as he can. Clint Fosdick, in writing those two letters, GI, was trying to do just one thing: *Name his killer.*"

Dakin's expression did not change. "GI isn't even a part of any of their names, Mr. Queen. Don't you think I thought of that?"

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"Well, Clint did have a problem, Dakin. Suppose the poisoner had been Wash Smith. Clint must have realized that he might start to write down the name Wash, or Washington, *but never get beyond the first letter* — he knew he was going fast. But if all he could manage to write down were the W of Washington, that W would apply equally to young Woodie, named after President Wilson. So, to avoid being misunderstood, Clint simply began to print his poisoner's *first* name."

"First name?" The police chief blinked.

"Thomas Jefferson Smith named his three sons after Presidents. So the boys' full names, like Jeff Smith's own, must begin with the first names of the Presidents they were named for. In fact, Private Smith is actually called Woodie, obviously for Woodrow of Woodrow Wilson Smith. Dr. Linc Smith's full name, then, must be Abraham Lincoln Smith. A for Abraham (or L for Lincoln), W for Woodrow (or for Wilson) — neither fits the GI.

"But how about Wash-for-Washington Smith," said Ellery, "always having to be bailed out of trouble — probably over his ears in debt and desperately needing his third of Clint's fortune now? There's your chuck in the woodpile, Dakin — the brother Lettie Dowling saw dosing the gin bottle with poison in the pantry yesterday morning. It was George Washington Smith whom Lettie saw, wasn't it? It's his fingerprints on the poison bottle?"

"Yes," said Wrightsville's chief of police slowly. "Wash is my man, all right. But Mr. Queen, Clint wrote GI — and Wash's first name, George, starts with GE."

"Tricky," said Ellery, squeezing Dakin's damp arm. "Poor old Clint got the G down all right, Dakin, but he died just as he completed the downstroke of the E."

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

and Black Mask section

Emily Jackson's "By His Own Act" is one of the thirteen "first stories" which won special awards in EQMM's Ninth Annual Contest — last year's competition. It is an extraordinary story for a first effort, and it qualifies not only as a literary accomplishment but also, in the very finest tradition, for our BLACK MASK *department. Here is the Homicide detective who is tough in the human, realistic sense — a completely believable character, not a clever caricature. Here are other hallmarks of the hardboiled school — the atmosphere, the undercurrent of delayed action, the personal involvement which the detective fights against but which he doesn't recognize as a kind of social consciousness. The story takes place in the deep of summer, and you will feel the heat, the depression, the brooding lull before the storm, the frustration, the voice of the city. It will all get under your skin . . . and like your grateful Editors, you will want to read more of Emily Jackson's work.*

The author has not written much about herself in answer to our inquiry about her background. She is a former English teacher (which is not at all surprising), is now a housewife, and is in her early thirties. Although she has always been interested in writing, she did not begin to do creative work, with a view to publication, until 1949. Since she was "a mystery fan from away back" (which is also not at all surprising), she turned first to this form — for which we should all be thankful. Yes, we urge Emily Jackson to continue writing about detectives who are realistic human beings, caught in credible human situations, and thinking believable human thoughts . . . and send your stories to EQMM.

BY HIS OWN ACT

by EMILY JACKSON

BY DAY THE CITY SWELTERED UNDER the blinding sun and by night the river-damp crept in, not to revive but to stifle. The pavements were never cool and people fled to the country, slept in the parks, crowded the air-conditioned places. Raw nerves tightened. The very old and the very

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young gasped for breath, and down on the waterfront the brawls and the knifings doubled.

When Macpherson left his desk and stepped into the street, the sun had dropped below the level of the buildings and the traffic had thinned. But the heat met him in a dizzying wave as he paused, lighting a cigarette. He stood there smoking for a while before he took refuge in a small restaurant that didn't quite live up to the *Air-Cooled* on the window. It was better than the street, though, and he sat for a long time at the counter over two cups of coffee. His second cup grew cold and he smoked all his cigarettes, and still he sat there. Finally he drank the cold coffee, flipped a quarter onto the counter, and went over to pay his check.

Thirty minutes later he parked his car close to an old house, among many old houses, most of them made over into cheap, furnished apartments. He sat in the car for a while, twisting his key chain through his fingers and looking at the row of dingy house fronts. On the steps of a few of the houses there were people sitting silent, hoping for a breath of air.

He got out of the car and went into the house. There were no door-bells in the narrow entry, but when he found the name he was looking for on one of the mailboxes, he saw *Second Floor* written beneath it. He mounted the stairs, and then paused looking down the dimly lit second-floor corridor. There were three open doors and a fourth, at the deeply shadowed far end, that was closed. He went with certainty toward the closed door. By the light of a match he read *Catherine Fallon* on a small typewritten card. He knocked.

As he waited, he listened to the house, quiet except for the sound of fans, the humming that was heat-made sound, the voice of deep summer in the city. It was so quiet that he heard the click of a light switch inside the apartment. Then there were footsteps and the door was opened.

"Miss Fallon?" he said. "I'm Macpherson, from Homicide. I was in charge of the Nichols shooting."

At first she looked as though she didn't understand him; then she stepped back and opened the door wider for him. "Won't you sit down?" she said, and nodded toward a chair.

The room — small, unsufferably hot, glaringly shabby under the unshaded light bulb — was indistinguishable from hundreds of other furnished apartments in the same neighborhood except for one thing: it was lined with books. They were crowded into the corners, on the tables, and along the mantel of the bricked-up fireplace. There was one pile on the floor. He saw the title of the book on top, and he knew what these were. He could see the passage in John Nichols's will: "And to my former wife, Catherine Fallon, I direct that the following books be given. . . ." That was what had led the police to her, although at the time the interview had been simple rou-

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tine, for nothing else had connected her with her ex-husband.

For a few minutes Macpherson looked at her in silence. She seemed anything but a prospective murderess. She was thin and angular, and she looked as though she would never be rested again this side of death. She sat very still in her crumpled waitress's uniform, with her face turned toward him. But her eyes were fixed on the wall behind him.

He almost discarded the story he had prepared, but he finally began, in a quiet formal manner. He said, "This visit is not official. In fact, it probably would not have been a visit at all if you had had a telephone. After Detective Coletta interviewed you, he told me you were disturbed ("Knocked for a loop," Coletta had said) because the Nichols case was going to be dropped. I thought I would tell you that the case isn't closed yet, officially, although we've done everything we could to make Morgan think it's closed. We hope that if Morgan thinks he's safe he may get careless." Now he spoke slowly and carefully. "I want to ask your cooperation. I came to see whether you could think of anything — anything at all — that might help us make an arrest."

Her eyes had shifted to his, and after a moment she spoke. "Are you sure Morgan killed him?"

"Yes. Aren't you?"

"Yes. But there is still no evidence?"

"No."

Her eyes slipped past him again, and she spoke to herself, not to him. "No. There wouldn't be."

He waited a moment before saying, "There's the motive, of course. But we haven't broken his alibi yet."

"He is clever."

"You know him then?" he asked, although that fact was duly recorded in the report lying in his desk.

"I knew him."

The silence lengthened until he broke it by saying, "Are you sure you can't help us."

"There's nothing more I can tell you."

He rose to go. "I won't bother you any longer," he said, "but maybe you'd like to know that I've still got Brewster — my best man — on Morgan. So far Morgan doesn't know he's being watched." (Brewster had said, "He watches for her and when he sees her, I could do handsprings and he wouldn't notice me.")

Her expression altered a little, but it was difficult to tell what the change meant. He moved away and she rose and followed him to the door. There he turned abruptly and said, "I think we'll get him. It's only been six weeks, and I've had to wait years on some cases. The police know how to be patient, you know, especially when they think they have the answers."

She said, "It's easy to be patient when you know what you're waiting for."

"Yes. Well. Well, if you think of anything — anything at all that you think might help — call me. That is,

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let us know. And please don't tell anyone about this. We don't want Morgan to know that he's being watched."

"There's no one for me to tell now." The slight bitterness in her voice was the first expression it had held since he had come in.

Back in the street, Macpherson mopped his forehead and wondered where the nearest air-conditioned place was. But as he climbed in the car and drove away, he realized he didn't have time to stop anywhere. He had told Coletta to meet him at his apartment. He hoped there was beer in the refrigerator.

As he parked his car in front of his apartment building, Coletta got up from the steps. "What happened to you?" Coletta complained. "I been waiting twenty minutes. Did something happen?"

They started up the stairs. Macpherson said, "Nothing happened. I hung around trying to decide whether to see her."

"Did you go?"

"Yes." Macpherson didn't say any more until he got the door open and the window fan turned on. "I'll get us some beers — if there are any.

"There'd better be," said Coletta, pulling a chair into the draft from the fan. Macpherson returned from the kitchen with two bottles opened. He handed one to Coletta, then stretched out on the long chesterfield and took a deep swallow from the bottle.

"Well, how did it go?" asked Coletta.

Macpherson reached for a cigarette. "Well, I talked to her, but I don't know what I got . . . or where," he added.

"What did you tell her?"

"I told her that we were still working on it, that we wanted her cooperation. I didn't get anything out of her on that, of course — didn't expect to. But that was my story. She didn't believe me."

"What did she say?"

"Nothing much. She wanted to know if I was sure Morgan killed Nichols. And she said Morgan was clever. And she said it was easy to be patient if you know what you wanted, or something like that."

Coletta gave a long stage-shudder. "I'd hate to be Morgan," he said.

"Yeah. Same here."

"Ask her what the hell she's doing on Morgan's doorstep every day?"

"No. I was too afraid of bungling the whole damn thing. I'm not sure I didn't anyhow."

"Did you tell her we knew she'd threatened Morgan?"

"No. Didn't seem necessary. Why else would I pay her a call? Besides, I thought it was enough to let her know that I was keeping Brewster on Morgan."

"How did she take that?"

"I think she was glad."

"Glad? Why the hell would she be glad?"

"I don't know. Maybe she wasn't. It's hard to tell about her."

"Yeah," said Coletta, "she's got a poker-face, that dame."

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Macpherson said, "Is that it, Nick? Would you call it that? Maybe there's just nothing left — nothing at all."

"Nothing left? What do you mean?"

"Oh, the props are gone, life's gone, everything's gone — hell, I don't know what I mean."

"Oh, well," said Coletta philosophically. "Anyway she's got Morgan so scared he's got no time for the police. He doesn't even know we're around."

"No. It makes it easy for Brewster." Macpherson was up now, walking around the room. He stopped and looked at Coletta. "What does Brewster think? He's on the spot."

"You mean, does he think she's serious? Oh, Brewster thinks she means business, all right. Says it gives him the creeps to see her. What makes you ask?"

Macpherson did not answer. There was a long silence. Coletta broke it finally, saying, "What's the matter, Mac?"

Macpherson lit another cigarette. "Nothing," he said shortly.

He went back to see her twice more. Then he told Coletta that he wouldn't go again. "If what I said got to her at all, she'll lay off," he said. "And if not, then she's probably pretty far gone and I might push her over the line." Then Brewster reported that she had threatened Morgan again. That evening Macpherson stayed late in his office, braving the heat, and read through all the file on the case, giving special attention to the report on her.

At 7:30 he was ringing her doorbell again.

She showed no surprise at seeing him and drew aside so that he could come in. On the table there was a half-played game of solitaire and a cup of coffee. She offered him some coffee and he accepted.

They sat silent while the heat seemed to gather in the summer dusk. He gave her no excuse for coming, had given her none after the first time. A simple intelligence would have grasped why he was there, and hers was not simple. He got up and walked to the one window, rolling an unlighted cigarette around in his fingers. He had a direct view of an apartment next door. There was a man stripped to the waist, sitting with his eyes closed near a fan; a woman pressed back the strands of hair from her damp forehead. Macpherson had a sudden idea.

"I haven't eaten. Come with me — we could go out of the city to a Drive-In. It's hot in town."

She hesitated.

"Don't worry. You won't have to talk," he said, with a slight edge to his voice, although he smiled.

Her mouth lifted slightly at the corners, but all she said was, "I'll be with you in a moment."

At the Drive-In, she admitted that she hadn't eaten, and she accepted a sandwich and a cup of coffee. She ate about half the sandwich. They sat

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for a while smoking. Car lights from the highway curving outside laced the parking-lot in an ever-shifting pattern of shafts. Motors started, horns tooted, but all noises were muted. The attendants spoke in low voices through car windows, hurried grim-faced through the hot light-flooded night to give in orders, hurried back with trays and change.

He did not try to make her talk. She answered the few remarks he addressed to her in her low, expressionless voice. It was cultivated speech; it went with the books.

After they had driven slowly back to the city, he went upstairs with her. She did not invite him to come in, but she made neither protest nor excuse when he followed her. She switched on the light and turned to face him.

"I may put another man on Morgan," he said.

"Does he know he's being watched?"

"No. He thinks he has nothing to fear — from us."

She said nothing. He took a deep breath. "Nichols' death shook you up badly."

"He was a good person."

"You divorced him almost ten years ago."

"Yes."

"Why?" He had nothing to lose from a direct question.

She did not appear to resent it. "He left for good."

"Why?"

"My habit of picking up strays."

A slight touch of bitterness again.

"Strays?"

"Human strays. Derelicts. People with nothing left to save in them, and nobody to care."

He stood in thought a moment. "But he kept in touch with you."

She looked at him out of shadowed, weary eyes. "Four years ago my derelicts caught up with me. I imagine that's in the police report."

He nodded.

"I lost my job. They were nice about it. They told me they realized that I hadn't known anything, that my intentions were good and charitable. But schools don't want teachers who . . ."

"Never mind," he said hurriedly. "I know."

She studied his reluctance. "It doesn't matter now," she said gently. "It's all far away now, and the humiliation . . ." She stopped and picked up the story again. "I was sick for a long time. I was broke — and broken. He came around and pulled me out."

"He still . . ."

"No." There was no violence in the disrupting monosyllable, but it came quickly. "He was through with me. But he was good and decent, and he knew I had no one to take care of me. He always kept track of me after that."

"The books . . ."

"They were all ones I had given him before we were married."

"Would you have married him again if he had asked you?"

"No."

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"Why not?"

"There was one thing he couldn't do for me. He couldn't give me back my self-respect."

He couldn't think of anything to say.

After a little she said sadly and hopelessly, "Morgan was one of my strays. That gives you some idea of the quality. He would never have known Morgan if it hadn't been for me. And then Morgan tried to blackmail him."

He still couldn't think of anything to say. She smiled a little and offered him a few more words. "Pity's not much good, you know."

"I've never felt it much."

"Then take my word for it."

He turned and walked slowly to the door. There, once again, he turned. "He must at least have thought you were worth saving."

She did not answer.

"Or he wanted to show you that you weren't quite alone — like one of those."

"He's dead now." He waited for something more, and it finally came. "He felt responsible for me, because he had left me, and he knew I had never been able to take care of myself."

The next day Nick Coletta brought him Brewster's report and laid it on the desk. Macpherson did not look up.

"Why don't you can it, Mac?" Coletta said. "You've already done more than you had to."

Macpherson was silent, but Coletta continued to argue. "Look at what it is, Mac. Morgan's a rat. Mixed up in a dozen nasty deals. For a couple of years we've been trying to hang something on him. He knocks off a decent guy because he thinks this guy's got something on him that'll stick. And he gets the guy before we know what it is. Now we got a killing to add to the list, but he's covered himself with an alibi we can't break. O.K. So she bumps off Morgan now. You've done what you could. Morgan's no loss to the world and he'll only get what he'd get if we could touch him. O.K. So she wants to ruin herself doing the job personally. She knows what she's up against."

"I haven't told her that we know she's threatened Morgan."

"Mac, you said yourself she should be able to guess that. Besides, you told her we've got a man on him."

"I still can't understand why she should be glad about that. I'd swear she was." He got up and took a few steps in the little office. "Of course, how do you know what people like her think? I don't mean she's crazy, but — well, she's been pushed too far. I asked her questions last night that ordinarily anyone would resent. She didn't care. She's past caring."

"Opened up, did she?"

"She talked a little," said Macpherson abruptly, turning back to his desk. He switched the fan off and on three or four times, catching the blades just before they idled to a stop. "I can't believe she could kill him."

"What do you mean? Listen, Brewster swears she means business."

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"I know, I know. But it doesn't fit somehow."

"If it doesn't fit, then what are you worrying about? So she doesn't kill him. So she just wants to worry him. Then what are *you* getting ulcers for?"

"I don't know," said Macpherson wearily. "You're probably right. I'll lay off."

But after a week he was still in doubt. At times he would almost convince himself that she was incapable of killing anyone; and then he would remember the threats and the impression she gave of being past caring what happened to her. He weighed her gentleness against her bitterness, and he didn't know. Sometimes he thought her apathy was too great for any action; but he would remember the hopeless suffering in her voice when she said, "He would never have known Morgan if it hadn't been for me." He would think of her in the sweltering-hot little room, surrounded by books she no longer read.

So, after a week, he went back to see her and to judge again. He dragged his mind to subjects that he thought might once have interested her, trying to find something that would strike a spark. He worked hard at it, but it wasn't much use. Her answers were prompt to the point of being automatic, and her interest never seemed engaged. As he was leaving, he said, "You know some people would think — probably most people would — that Nichols had given you the raw end of the deal. Leaving you, I mean."

He had hit the quick; her face showed it. She did not answer.

He persisted. "After all, your derelicts, as you call them — picking up strays, you said — that only shows kindness. Charity's charity, you know, even when it turns out wrong."

There was a slowly rising flush on her face and neck. Her mouth quivered a little. He saw that he had at last produced an effect of some sort, and his voice grew insistent. "God knows I don't know much about charity, except to know it's rare. I've learned that the hard way. And the only real kind is the kind that doesn't think. But anyway — well, some people would think he was wrong."

The flush had deepened and her eyes were wide and dark. The slight quivering of her mouth had softened the lines and her face was now more than bones and shadow. When she spoke, her voice was vibrant, completely altered in her emotion. He drew his breath in sharply, for he saw in this moment all that she once had been. "A man has a right to think his wife will put him first. He has a right to think that she won't destroy him."

At the last words her face drained of color and expression, and was more empty and vacant than he had ever seen it. He left, not knowing whether he had gained anything or not. He decided he would never go back again.

But he did. This time he had the excuse that something had happened. She had started making two visits a

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day to the neighborhood of Morgan's house. For three days she had returned around 9 o'clock in the evening, just as dusk was closing in. Brewster reported that Morgan seemed more jittery and that he seldom left the house now.

When Macpherson knocked on her door, he heard a movement and the sound of wood on wood before he heard her steps in the room. She invited him to come in this time, and offered him a cup of coffee. While she was getting it, he looked around. The room was different, and he picked out the changes. The pile of books that Nichols had left her was gone. Everything was cleared off the tables. He became uneasy. He saw that the desk was also cleared, and the wastepaper basket was full. One drawer was not quite closed; he moved over to look and eased it out. It was empty except for a gun. He slipped the gun into his pocket as he heard her steps coming back.

He gave her time only to set the cups down before he said, "What do you think you're doing?" in a voice that was even rougher than he had intended. "Are you out of your mind? Don't you care what happens to you? Haven't you guessed we know you threatened Morgan?"

No answer. His voice was cold now, and insulting. "I didn't think it was necessary to draw pictures for you. It seemed to me that anyone of average intelligence should see what the situation is. Well, just let me say that most of what you've said to Morgan has been heard. Even though you've never said outright what you meant, we can add it together. If you try to take any action against Morgan, Brewster will see you. A defense attorney would have a hard time. Think it over."

She said, "But by his own act . . ." — and then she stopped abruptly.

He started to go, but as he got to the door she put out a hand to stop him. When he had turned to face her, she said. "Do you think you will be able to get Morgan?"

He said, "Yes." He was lying, and he saw that she knew it.

He went directly to his office after leaving her, and he immediately despatched a man to watch her. "For God's sake, Hunter, don't lose her, and try to keep her from doing anything. Tonight you can keep pretty far back. I don't think she'll do anything tonight. But watch out."

Nick Coletta had stepped into the office in time to hear these parting instructions. "What gives?"

Macpherson laid the gun on his desk. Nick raised his eyebrows and whistled through his teeth.

"I found it in a drawer. It isn't loaded, and I didn't find anything to load it with, though I didn't try to look around. I don't think she's likely to have two, and she'll have to get another or think up something else to do. That's why I think it's O.K. for tonight."

"Now will you believe she means business?"

"I don't know. I suppose so,"

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Macpherson said dully. He sat with his head in his hands for a while. Then he was up, walking back and forth. It was hotter than ever and very sultry. A storm was on the way. Nick looked at his watch. "It's after 8," he said. "I wonder if she'll go back to Morgan's house again tonight."

"Maybe. She asked me if I thought we'd get Morgan."

"What did you say?"

"I said yes. But she knew I was lying."

"I don't know, Mac. We might be able to pull him in. He's so nervous now that he's going to do something. And he still hasn't tumbled to us. He might give us the break we need and he might do it soon, too."

Macpherson stopped pacing and looked at Coletta. "You could be right."

"Sure I could."

"But he won't if she pots him one."

"Well, if you're right, we have another night and maybe another day at the least. I think you're right — she'll have to think up some other plan. But maybe she never will."

Macpherson started walking up and down again. After a while he said, "I asked her straight out tonight what she thought she was doing."

"What did she say?"

"Well, it was funny. She didn't answer at first. And then all she said was 'by his own act' or something like that. And stopped."

"What the hell did she mean by that?"

"I don't know. Unless she thinks she could persecute him into suicide. I suppose she might think that."

Nick looked doubtful. "Ye-es. It sounds that way, sort of. But if she knows Morgan at all she'd know he's not the kind of rat to kill himself."

"No. If she doesn't get him first, he's much more likely to — likely to —" They stared at each other. Macpherson quoted, " 'By his own act.' "

Nick was standing. "Mac, he doesn't know he's watched."

"And she does. My God, I've had the whole thing wrong."

They started out of the office, running. Macpherson yelled for a car. Then they were tearing along the street with the siren going. The clouds had shut off the last of the daylight and the rain was near.

Nick said, "It's a good thing you put a man on her."

"Yes, but I told him to keep back," Macpherson said harshly. "I told him I didn't think anything would happen tonight."

They pulled into the street three blocks below Morgan's house, just as the rain broke in torrents. A small knot of people at the mouth of a dark alley showed they were too late. Macpherson jumped out before Nick had brought the car to a full stop. He saw Brewster with an armlock on Morgan, and he heard Brewster say, "Sorry, Mac. I didn't catch on. I was keeping too far back." He heard Nick Coletta say, "How bad?" and Brewster answer, "Pretty bad. Hunter's called an ambulance. We thought we'd better not move her."

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The rain poured down and he knelt suddenly and tried to shield her face with his body. Now he could hear the ambulance siren screaming toward him. She stirred a little and he bent closer to her.

"Morgan?" she asked.

"We got him." His voice was tight but she recognized it and opened her eyes.

"I'm sorry," she said.

The ambulance was there then, and they looked her over briefly and carried her away. He stood in the rain looking out at the street. For a long time he was not aware of Coletta standing behind him. Nick said, "She figured it this way all the time, Mac. You were right when you said she was glad we had a man on him. She wanted that. She didn't have to worry about his getting away with it again."

He shrugged resignedly.

"It was the only thing I was right about."

"You did what you could, Mac. Dammit, you did what you could."

NEXT MONTH . . .

Five prize-winning stories, including:

Philip MacDonald's THE MAN OUT OF THE RAIN
Zenna Henderson's YOU KNOW WHAT, TEACHER?
Hodding Carter's BAD CHECK

and another new story to celebrate the Editors' 25th Anniversary:

Ellery Queen's DIAMONDS IN PARADISE

and five other unusual and "unknown" stories, including:

Hugh Pentecost's MURDER PLAYS THROUGH
Michael Gilbert's THE CUSTOMER IS NOT ALWAYS RIGHT
Jack London's THE UNEXPECTED

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We usually think of the short-short story as a relatively modern literary form. This is probably incorrect; surely the 1500-to-2000-word tale must go back, in one form or another, to the most antique times of story-telling. But as a slick-magazine product in the United States, the short-short had its first flowering in the early 1920s, and according to our notes on the subject the chief credit for encouraging and developing the short-short should go to "Collier's," who began making it a special weekly feature about 30 years ago. Of course, writers had experimented with the short-short form before it became so commercially popular — including, surprising as it may seem, Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes. We bring you now a comparatively "unknown" example of the Doyle touch in this field. We don't know exactly when "How It Happened" was written, but it first appeared in book form in 1918 — thus anticipating the American literary vogue for the "storiette."

HOW IT HAPPENED

by ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

I CAN REMEMBER SOME THINGS UPON that evening most distinctly, and others are like vague, broken dreams. That is what makes it so difficult to tell a connected story. I have no idea now what it was that had taken me to London and brought me back so late. It just merges into all my other visits to London. But from the time that I got out at the little country station everything is extraordinarily clear. I can live it again — every instant of it.

I remember so well walking down the platform and looking at the illuminated clock at the end which told me that it was half-past 11. I remember also my wondering whether I could get home before midnight. Then I remember the big automobile, with its glaring headlights and glitter of polished brass, waiting for me outside. It was my new Robur, which had only been delivered that day. I remember also asking Perkins, my chauffeur, how she had gone, and his saying that he thought she was excellent.

"I'll try her myself," said I, and I climbed into the driver's seat.

"The gears are not the same," said he. "Perhaps, sir, I had better drive."

"No; I should like to try her," said I.

And so we started on the five-mile drive for home.

My old car had the gears as they used to be, in notches on a bar. In this car you passed the gear-lever through a gate to get to the higher speeds. It was not difficult to master, and soon I thought that I understood

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it. It was foolish, no doubt, to begin to learn a new system in the dark, but one often does foolish things, and one has not always to pay the full price for them. I got along very well until I came to Claystall Hill. It is one of the worst hills in England, a mile and a half long, with three sharp curves. My park gates stand at the very foot of it upon the main London road.

We were just over the brow of this hill, where the grade is steepest, when the trouble began. I had been on the top speed and wanted to get her on the free; but she stuck between gears, and I had to get her back on the top again. By this time she was going at a great rate, so I clapped on both brakes, and one after the other the brakes gave way. I didn't mind so much when I felt my footbrake snap, but when I put all my weight on my emergency brake, and the lever clanged to its full limit without a catch, it brought a cold sweat out of me. By this time we were fairly tearing down the slope. The lights were brilliant, and I brought her round the first curve all right. Then we did the second one, though it was a close shave for the ditch. There was a mile of straight road then, with the third curve beneath it, and after that the gate of the park. If I could shoot into that harbor all would be well, for the slope up to the house would bring the car to a stand.

Perkins behaved splendidly. I should like that to be known. He was perfectly cool and alert. I had thought at the very beginning of taking the bank, and he read my intention.

"I wouldn't do it, sir," said he. "At this pace it must go over and we should have it on top of us."

Of course he was right. He got to the ignition switch and turned it off, so we were in the free; but we were still running at a fearful pace. He laid his hands on the wheel.

"I'll keep her steady," said he, "if you care to jump and chance it. We can never get round that curve. Better jump, sir."

"No," said I, "I'll stick it out. You can jump if you like."

"I'll stick it with you, sir," said he.

If it had been the old car I should have jammed the gear-lever into reverse, and seen what would happen. I expect she would have stripped her gears or smashed up somehow, but it would have been a chance. As it was, I was helpless. Perkins tried to climb across, but you couldn't do it going at that speed. The wheels were whirring like a high wind and the big body creaking and groaning with the strain. But the lights were brilliant, and one could steer to an inch. I remember thinking what an awful and yet majestic sight we should appear to anyone who met us. It was a narrow road, and we were just a great, roaring, golden death to anyone who came in our path.

We got round the corner with one wheel three feet high upon the bank. I thought we were surely over, but after staggering for a moment she righted and darted onwards. That

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was the third corner and the last one. There was only the park gate now. It was facing us, but, as luck would have it, not facing us directly. It was about twenty yards to the left up the main road into which we ran. Perhaps I could have done it, but I expect that the steering wheel had been jarred when we ran on the bank. The wheel did not turn easily. We shot out of the lane. I saw the open gate on the left. I whirled the wheel around with all the strength of my wrists. Perkins and I threw our bodies across, and then the next instant, going at tremendous speed, my right front wheel struck full on the right-hand pillar of my own gate. I heard the crash. I was conscious of flying through the air, and then — and then —

When I became aware of my own existence once more, I was among some brushwood in the shadow of the oaks upon the lodge side of the drive. A man was standing beside me. I imagined at first that it was Perkins, but when I looked again I saw that it was Stanley, a man whom I had known at college some years before, and for whom I had a really genuine affection. There was always something peculiarly sympathetic to me in Stanley's personality; and I was proud to think that I had some similar influence upon him. At the present moment I was surprised to see him, but I was like a man in a dream, giddy and shaken and quite prepared to take things as I found them.

"What a smash!" I said. "Good Lord, what an awful smash!"

He nodded his head, and even in the gloom I could see that he was smiling the gentle, wistful smile which I connected with him.

I was quite unable to move. Indeed, I had not any desire to try to move. But my senses were exceedingly alert. I saw the wreck of the automobile lit up by the moving lanterns. I saw the little group of people and heard the hushed voices. There were the lodge-keeper and his wife, and one or two more. They were taking no notice of me, but were very busy round the car. Then suddenly I heard a cry of pain.

"The weight is on him. Lift it easy," cried a voice.

"It's only my leg!" said another one, which I recognized as Perkins's. "Where's master?" he cried.

"Here I am," I answered, but they did not hear me; they were all bending over something which lay in front of the car.

Stanley laid his hand upon my shoulder, and his touch was inexpressibly soothing. I felt light and happy, in spite of everything.

"No pain, of course?" said he.

And then suddenly a wave of amazement passed over me. Stanley! *Stanley!* Why, Stanley had died of enteric at Bloemfontein in the Boer War!

"Stanley!" I cried, and the words seemed to choke my throat. "Stanley, you are dead!"

He looked at me with the same old gentle, wistful smile.

"So are you," he answered.

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PRIZE-WINNING STORY

John L. Hayward's first story for EQMM was a prize-winner in our Eighth Annual Contest and appeared in the July 1953 issue as the first original story in the then newly launched Black Mask department. It was a tough-romantic yarn titled "'Bye, 'Bye, Darling," but it had one undeniable quality: it was as authentic as the best in the hardboiled school. And no wonder: Mr. Hayward is a real-life detective; he works at it, he knows what he is talking about.

Now Mr. Hayward gives us another prize-winning story, and like A. H. Z. Carr's story last month (compared with previous Carr stories), Mr. Hayward's is altogether different from the earlier tale bearing the Hayward name. In "Heat Spell" we have no rough-tough 'tec, no hard and brittle style, no raw and raucous plot. We do have other qualities often found in the Black Mask tradition — a subdued sense of excitement, an oppressive atmosphere — but these are the trademarks not only of the realistic school but of most realistic writing. And you will find them in Mr. Hayward's story combined with a tenderness of feeling far removed from the romanticism of the tough 'tec, and a shining, sensitive, almost poetic goodness that will do your heart good.

HEAT SPELL

by JOHN L. HAYWARD

STORE DETECTIVE HENRY DUFFY eyed the people who crowded his cubbyhole of an office and wished he had never heard of Woodstone's Department Store. The heat and humidity were stifling, and his skin crawled with trickling drops of perspiration. He longed to take off his coat and shirt — and his shoes. But that was out of the question, of course, and a sense of frustration added to his general discomfort and irritation. Then, these awful people!

The hatchet-faced woman with the sharp, accusing voice was overdressed and overwarm — and overwrought. Undoubtedly, the heat had more to do with her present attitude than anything else. After all, she had suffered no loss. Her $10 was safely back in her purse and a reasonable person would have been grateful that the incident had ended so well — and gone on home. Not this one. She wanted to make a career out of it. To hear her tell it, the glassy-eyed, white-faced

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little boy standing in front of the desk was a future Dillinger.

"I don't feel the matter should be dropped," the overdressed woman was saying. "According to the boy, his mother gave him permission to come downtown. That may or may not be true — frankly, I doubt it — and if it is true, there is certainly a lack of proper supervision — of *any* supervision, in fact. Now, Mr. — Mr. — "

"Duffy," the store detective supplied, his round face inscrutable.

"Now, what is your usual procedure in cases of this kind, Mr. Duffy?"

The detective stirred helplessly — and hopelessly — in his swivel chair. His years of experience as a former police officer on the metropolitan force and his five years at Woodstone's since his retirement had taught him there was no usual procedure. Each case was mostly different. It was difficult to explain that to the average person and especially to a woman like — what was her name? — oh, yes, Miss Knoxton — Miss Amelia Knoxton.

"Well, this is sort of an open-and-shut case, Miss Knoxton," he said, smoothly evading the question. "You seen him take the money, of course — "

She hadn't, and neither had Mrs. Hammer, the harassed and unhappy clerk, who had brought accuser and accused to his office — a fact that Duffy knew well. He was stalling for time. In the back of his mind was resentment that two adults should leave a $10 bill in such an exposed position that it would immediately become an object of temptation to anyone — and more so to the threadbare boy they had brought to him for judgment, sentence, and execution. Duffy liked the boy's looks, too. The youngster was scared to death, but there was something manly about him.

"I didn't actually *see* him take the money," Miss Knoxton corrected, a touch of exasperation in her voice. "I thought I made that quite clear. After my first purchase, I asked to see a — a — an additional item. I left the $10 on the counter and turned my back for an instant. When I looked again, the money was gone. This boy and the girl were standing in the aisle — and he had it in his hand." She turned to the boy, a grimace of a smile on her lips. "It *was* my $10, wasn't it?"

Tiny dewdrops of perspiration dotted the boy's forehead and upper lip. His head jerked assent.

"And you *did* take it off the counter?" Miss Knoxton persisted.

Another jerky nod.

"How old are you?" Duffy asked him.

The youngster tore his attention from his accuser with apparent difficulty and faced the detective. His lips barely moved and his voice was almost inaudible. "Eight," he said.

Duffy leaned forward in his chair and looked over the edge of the desk at the little girl who held the boy's hand. She was as small and exquisite as a flower. Her blonde hair was pulled back into a horse's tail and held

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in place by a doubled-up rubber band. The starched yellow dress stood out from her body like an inverted blossom. She stared at him from awed blue eyes.

"How old is your sister?" Duffy asked.

The boy looked down at his diminutive companion and she trustingly returned his gaze. He swallowed. "Three," he said, the word strangling in his throat.

"Why did you take the money?"

The youngster hung his head and stared at the edge of the worn desk.

"I don't know," he mumbled.

Duffy sighed. It was too hot for this sort of thing — much too hot. He settled back in his chair and frowned. Somehow, he felt that the heat was the real culprit. The Lord only knew what had inspired the boy to take the money, but very probably visions of heaping dishes of ice cream and foaming sodas had come to his mind when he saw the bill on the counter. If it wasn't for the heat, the boy might not have been tempted — and if it wasn't for the same intolerable, sticky humidity, the hatchet-faced spinster wouldn't be obesessed with the idea that some severe penalty must be imposed.

He became conscious, quite suddenly, that Miss Knoxton was glaring at him. For one heat-inspired instant he was prompted to glare in return. Quickly, to avoid the temptation, he returned his attention to the boy.

"Why did you come to the store?"

The boy still stared at the desk.

"To see the toys," he said finally.

"The twains," a tiny voice corrected.

Duffy leaned forward again and looked over the edge of the desk into the wide blue eyes of the little girl. Of course, he thought, the trains. He turned to Mrs. Hammer, the distraught clerk.

"Did you notice them in the store, Mrs. Hammer — before this happened?" he asked her.

The heat had affected her, too. She looked wilted and depressed. Damp, frizzy strands of brown-gray hair escaped from her careful coiffure like so many rusty wires. She was a dumpy, bewildered-looking woman and the situation was clearly beyond her scope. Her fingers trembled as they moved over her head, trying to tuck the stray wisps of hair back into place.

"No, I didn't, Mr. Duffy," she said respectfully.

"I feel the matter should be turned over to the police," Miss Knoxton inserted impatiently. "The home conditions are, no doubt, atrocious!"

For several humid seconds the store detective hated Miss Knoxton. If she wanted the police, then let her have the police! Let some judge sitting in an air-conditioned office decide what should be done. Duffy didn't like the situation, anyway. The boy didn't look — or react — like the ordinary thief. There must be an underlying motive that was not apparent in the circumstances. Duffy could feel a sense of incompleteness. Something didn't fit — or was missing. It was this feeling that made him curb his

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anger and try to bring himself to the mental effort necessary to think clearly and logically about the affair. If he could only think it through, he felt confident that he could influence the irate Miss Knoxton to accept his decision.

It was much too hot to think, however. How could Woodstone's expect him to handle situations like this in a ten-by-ten "centrally located" office that depended on louvers, set high in the walls, for its only ventilation? Of one thing he was sure: just as soon as this matter was settled, he was going direct to Mr. Woodstone himself and demand a portable fan for his desk. This idea, coupled with Mrs. Hammer's nervous hands and disheveled hair, roused him from his heat-created torpor and started a latent thought process going through his mind. He pushed back his chair and hoisted his rotund bulk to a standing position.

"Let's go back to where all this happened," he heard himself saying.

He opened the door and waited for the others to precede him. Miss Knoxton, her face tense with impatience, followed the clerk and at a nod from him, the children trailed in their wake. The boy still held firmly to the little girl's hand, as though conscious of a deep-lying responsibility toward her — even in his present predicament.

Out in the main part of the store it seemed degrees cooler. Overhead, huge four-bladed fans revolved lazily, causing an unfelt but definite circulation of the air. As they threaded their way through the counters, toward Mrs. Hammer's section, Duffy caught a glimpse of Miss Knoxton's face. It seemed less tense. Certainly, getting them out of the office had in itself been a stroke of inspiration. A few minutes more in that stuffy cubicle and she would have been insisting that he hang the boy by the thumbs or cut off his hands.

As soon as Mrs. Hammer reached her own section, she seemed to gain in poise and alertness. The small fan on the shelf behind her counter, though, probably had more to do with it than getting back into her natural habitat. The fan swung on its base in a small, tight arc, bringing a windy coolness to all their faces and picking up new wisps of stringy brown hair from Mrs. Hammer's head.

Duffy felt a real twinge of annoyance that she should enjoy a fan in her section when the store had not seen fit to provide one for his unventilated office. It could be, however, that it was her own personal property. That, he reflected, was the thing to do — buy a fan himself and put it in his office. He wondered idly why he hadn't done it before and then realized there were only a few days each year when the temperature reached the unbearable degree it had registered today.

"Now, where was the money?" he asked, deliberately coaxing a smile to his lips.

The smile made no impression on Miss Knoxton. Her face, although more relaxed, still showed her irri-

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tation. It was clear that she thought him doddering, incompetent, and more than somewhat of a fool. Too, she seemed to realize that his sympathy lay with the boy. Her lips grim, she pointed out a spot on the counter.

"Is that the *exact* spot?"

"It is," Miss Knoxton said, acid in her voice. "I laid it right beside this — this — whatever it is!" She indicated a small, portable, sales-slip machine while Mrs. Hammer nodded in confirmation.

Duffy took a stick of gum from the side pocket of his coat and smiled down at the little girl in the yellow dress.

"Like gum?" he asked.

She stared at it with blue-eyed fascination, smiled, and nodded her head in quick, decisive assent.

"Can you reach it?" he wanted to know. He laid the gum on the counter, in the exact spot the $10 bill had occupied. "Go on, try it," he urged.

The child pulled her hand free of her brother's, chinned herself on the counter to locate the stick of gum, then hooked one round arm up and over in an effort to reach it. Her fingers worked like eager pink tentacles, but try as she might, the gum was inches from her groping hand. Duffy picked it up from the counter and gave it to her.

"I'm afraid," Miss Knoxton said, anger causing a tremor in her voice, "you're grasping at straws. It has been rather obvious, from your attitude, that you feel the boy should not be held responsible for his act. Would you please direct me to the manager?"

Duffy so far forgot himself that he returned her cold stare. He made no answer, however. Instead, he pulled out his wallet, took a bill from the fold, and laid it on the counter between the two women. Mrs. Hammer stared at it blankly, the fan plucking at her hair with invisible fingers, as though she half expected him to ask for some item in her section.

"Now, Miss Knoxton," Duffy requested gravely, "would you be kind enough to show me your movements — after you left the $10 bill on the counter?"

The woman turned, without a word, took two steps down the aisle, stopped, then turned again, facing him with icy impatience.

"And you, Mrs. Hammer," Duffy said gently.

It took seconds for the clerk to realize what he wanted, then she hurried along the counter to a position directly across from Miss Knoxton.

"I had my back turned," she said nervously, her fingers busy with her hair.

The store detective ignored both of them. He watched the dollar bill. The fan behind the counter had swung to the limit of its arc to the right. Now it hesitated and came back. As it neared its arc to the left, the edge of the paper dollar fluttered suddenly and the bill slid gently across the polished surface of the counter to within a few inches of the edge, and stopped. Duffy glanced at Miss Knoxton.

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She stared at the money, the muscles loosening in her face and twin white spots growing on her cheeks. She opened her mouth as though to speak, then gasped as the edge of the bill began to flutter again. The fan had swung through its short arc and was once more blowing across the top of the counter. This time, the dollar bill slid over the edge and landed at the feet of the two children. The little girl looked at it, squatted suddenly, picked it up and proffered it to the boy.

He took it from her automatically, a small frown of bewilderment disturbing the set hopelessness in his face, and handed it to Duffy.

"You didn't take the money, did you?" the store detective said gently.

The boy stared at him, gulped, and shook his head.

"Your sister gave it to you, didn't she?"

This time he nodded, and for the first time his eyes glistened.

"Did you see where she got it?"

The boy swallowed again and blinked at the tears that threatened to spill down his cheeks. He shook his head from side to side and then, very suddenly, began to cry.

Duffy took out his handkerchief, hunkered down on his heels, wiped the tears away, and placed an arm around the boy's shoulders.

"Why did you tell the lady you took it?" he asked.

The boy's chest heaved. He looked at Duffy, then down into the bewildered and trustful blue eyes of the diminutive creature who clasped his finger.

"She — she — she's my sister," he said, as though that explained everything.

Duffy looked up at Miss Knoxton, then used the handkerchief to blow his own nose. She was sniffling, too. He had been right all along about the heat and the humidity. They were the real criminals in the case.

Note:

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EQMM's DETECTIVE DIRECTORY

edited by ROBERT P. MILLS

A SHILLING FOR CANDLES *by JOSEPHINE TEY* (MACMILLAN, $2.50)	". . . not too convincing dénouement . . . Otherwise a joy absolute . . . warmth and charm and sympathy and insight . . ." (AB)	"The Tey magic hadn't reached its heights 14 years ago, but some of it is here . . . characters . . . superb." (LGO)
THE LONESOME BADGER *by FRANK GRUBER* (RINEHART, $2.50)	". . . incredibly fast and a lot of fun, with a definitely surprising solution . . ." (AB)	"Frivolous plot unraveled with mirth and high melodrama." (DD)
DIAMONDS FOR DANGER *by D. E. WALKER* (HARPER, $2.50)	". . . amusing . . . plot and characters are both very entertaining." (FC)	"Pleasantly written, tries a little too hard to be funny. Fairly amusing." (AdV)
TEARS FOR THE BRIDE *by ROBERT MARTIN* (DODD, MEAD, $2.50)	". . . good, underplayed tension among likable and interesting people." (AB)	"Pretty good plot and situation . . . but . . . people . . . overdrawn . . ." (AdV)
DEATH IN HIGH HEELS *by CHRISTIANNA BRAND* (SCRIBNERS, $2.50)	"Standard fare, but unusually well served." (AB)	". . . cleverly written sophisticated yarn, it adds up pretty much fluff." (AdV)
THE BUSINESS AT BLANCHE CAPEL *by BRYAN MORGAN* (LITTLE, BROWN, $3.75)	". . . shallow as a novel . . . and inept as a thriller . . ." (AB)	"Not in the least melodramatic, but absorbing and utterly convincing . . ." (AdV)
DEAD BY NOW *by MARGARET ERSKINE* (CRIME CLUB, $2.75)	". . . standard Scotland Yard puzzle-novel —with a very bad puzzle . . . all fairly readable." (AB)	"Confusing, bizarre story, written with a certain baroque charm. Fair enough." (AdV)
THE EVIL OF TIME *by EVELYN BERCKMAN* (DODD, MEAD, $2.75)	". . . an uneven but decidedly interesting first novel." (AB)	"The writing's good and the characters vivid . . . C plus." (LGO)

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Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine rounds up the judgment of reviewers across the country. The key on the right gives sources.

". . . originally published in England in 1936 but never . . . in this country . . . Mystery writing at its very finest." (FP)	"If you don't already know it, Josephine Tey is one of the eternal greats of mystery." (DBH)	
"Sudden death fails to dampen principals' spirits. Lively comic strip." (SC)	". . . fresher, faster, and more fun than ever . . . brash, bright entertainment." (DBH)	*KEY TO REVIEW SOURCES* AB: *Anthony Boucher in the New York Times* FC: *Frances Crane in the Evansville Press* SC: *Sergeant Cuff in The Saturday Review* DD: *Drexel Drake in the Chicago Tribune* H-M: *Brett Halliday and Helen McCloy in the Fairfield County Fair* DBH: *Dorothy B. Hughes in the Albuquerque Tribune* LGO: *Lenore Glen Offord in the San Francisco Chronicle* FP: *Fay Profilet in the Saint Louis Post-Dispatch* AdV: *Avis de Voto in the Boston Globe*
"Jolly and jaunty job." (SC)	". . . a charming story . . . at times a little too much so . . . still, much better than the run . . ." (DBH)	
"Has weak spots, but people real, action speedy, writing smooth." (SC)	"Engaging rural setting for puzzle of deep villainy . . . solved excitingly." (DD)	
"Sophisticated, puzzling, and thoroughly elegant in craftsmanship . . ." (FC)	". . . a beguiling storyteller . . . truly superlative fare." (DBH)	
"Too heavy on dialogue, but characterization good, handling bright." (SC)	". . . magnificently written adventure . . . far above average." (FC)	
"Old actors (some bad) lend touches of color to leisurely yarn." (SC)	"Fascinating family background for a tale of creepy violence and competent detecting." (DD)	
". . . brilliantly written. The scene . . . is most vividly evoked . . ." (H-M)	". . . a splendid story on all counts. Don't miss." (DBH)	

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PRIZE-WINNING STORY

Here is a new and unusual kind of detective story that we were much taken with. It is the story of a wire-service newsman who solves a series of murders through deductions made while "processing" a breaking news story. A good part of the yarn, therefore, is contained in the original teletype messages. The author tells us that this is no mere feat of the imagination: the trick was actually performed in real life by William Brink, night manager of the United Press Chicago bureau, when he was instrumental in capturing a killer at large last year; Brink never left his Chicago news desk, yet his deductions from the incoming teletype reports alerted sheriffs and state police in the midwest, and ultimately led to the killer's apprehension.

The author, James M. Ullman, is still on the sunny side of thirty. Except for a two-and-a-half year stretch in the Navy and another year on Guam as an air-force civilian employee, Mr. Ullman's only adult work has been in the newspaper business — as a deskman at that same Chicago bureau of the United Press, a police reporter on the La Porte "Herald-Argus," an editor and editorial director on the Skokie, Illinois, "News," where his wife was also on the staff, and also in the editorial end. After undergraduate studies at Wright Junior College in Chicago and DePaul University, Mr. Ullman is now (at the time of this writing) a full-time graduate student at the Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University. By the time he receives his master's degree (shortly before his story is scheduled to appear in print), Mr. Ullman will have been going to college, off and on, for eleven years — inspired by his desire to learn more about the business in which he has earned his living, and made possible only by his wonderfully understanding wife whose work as a newspaperwoman paid the rent and helped with the tuition while ambitious hubby studied, gathered newspaper clippings, and filled their modest apartment with an incredible clutter of notes and partially completed themes.

It's a heart-warming picture! And it explains in part the absolutely authentic sound of Mr. Ullman's newspaper story — although something inside of Mr. Ullman himself must be responsible for the mounting interest and sustained suspense in his fascinating yarn.

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ANYTHING NEW ON THE STRANGLER?

by JAMES M. ULLMAN

ERNIE BURNETT ROLLED UP HIS SLEEVES AND EASED THE KNOT IN HIS TIE. He was a short man, lean and wiry. His fading red hair was cropped close. A cigarette dangled from his lips.

Phones rang. A few rewrite men pecked at their typewriters, while the bureau manager argued noisily with the chief operator and the chief operator's assistant. But the rhythm of the teletype, funneling news into and out of the San Francisco bureau of the World Press Association, formed a pulsating backdrop to all other sounds.

Gutowski had arranged the bulk of the day's news report on Burnett's end of the big desk. Now Gutowski stood back, his earnest face pale and lined with fatigue.

"How's it going?" Burnett asked.

"Routine," Gutowski said. "There's a train wreck breaking in Pennsylvania. Flying saucers over Wisconsin. Communist riots expected in Berlin, and a few hot congressional hearings. Not much else, Ernie."

Gutowski was nine months out of a journalism school. Burnett, who had been in wire service since the tail end of the Hoover administration, sometimes thought Gutowski was trying a trifle too hard to make good. Or was it just that he, Burnett, was growing old?

Burnett grunted and sat down. He looked briefly at a summary of the biggest stories to develop thus far in the day. Already he was weighing these stories in his mind, trying to judge which was the most important, the second most important . . .

"Anything new on the Chicago strangler?"

He almost added: "I used to work in the Chicago bureau, you know," but he stopped in time. No use reviving an office joke. Ernie Burnett had worked in so many World Press bureaus that the wiseacres had decided he would say, "I used to work in" to any location named.

"There's an overniter on top of the left-hand pile," Gutowski told him. "I didn't get around to it."

Burnett picked up the Chicago story. He had been a good police reporter once, and he still believed that no news day was complete without a good crime yarn. Further, the recent stories about the Chicago strangler troubled him. But what disturbed him was still elusive, still beyond definition. He now had a strang feeling about the crimes as he read:

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CGO 14

CHICAGO, JULY 23 (WP) -- POLICE ADMITTED TODAY THAT THEIR LAST SOLID CLUE TO THE IDENTITY OF THE PHANTOM STRANGLER WHO MURDERED FIVE YOUNG WOMEN IN THE LAST TWO MONTHS IS WORTHLESS.

DETECTIVES HAD HOPED THAT A MAN'S COAT BUTTON FOUND NEAR THE BODY OF 19-YEAR-OLD IRMA BRONSON WOULD GIVE THEM A LEAD TO THE SLAYER.

BUT LAST NIGHT THEY LEARNED THAT THE BUTTON BELONGED TO THE MURDERED GIRL'S BROTHER, KEITH, 27.

DETECTIVES THEORIZED THAT THE BUTTON FELL FROM THE BRONSON GIRL'S PURSE IN A STRUGGLE THAT PRECEDED HER DEATH.

"ALL WE CAN DO IS HOPE THIS KILLER DOESN'T STRIKE AGAIN," CHIEF OF DETECTIVES BARNEY RYAN ADMITTED. "WE'RE GOING BACK OVER OUR OLD LEADS, BUT THE KILLER'S HAPHAZARD METHOD OF SELECTING HIS VICTIMS DOESN'T LEAVE US MUCH TO WORK ON."

IRMA BRONSON'S BODY WAS FOUND IN AN ALLEY TWO DAYS AGO. SHE HAD BEEN STRANGLED WITH A LENGTH OF GREEN SASH CORD.

SINCE MAY, FOUR OTHER GIRLS, ALL IN THEIR TEENS OR EARLY TWENTIES, HAVE BEEN STRANGLED IN THE SAME WAY.

THE STRANGLER'S FIRST VICTIM, TINA FREDERICKSON, 24, A MODEL, WAS FOUND DEAD IN HER BASEMENT APARTMENT MAY 19.

THE SECOND, FRANCES GOLDMAN, 21, A TELEPHONE OPERATOR, WAS SLAIN EARLY IN THE MORNING OF MAY 30 IN THE VESTIBULE OF HER APARTMENT BUILDING.

THE BODY OF MIRIAM MILLER, 25, A DEPARTMENT STORE CLERK, WAS FOUND IN A CLUMP OF BUSHES IN JACKSON PARK JUNE 18. AND JANE WARING, 22, DAUGHTER OF A WEALTHY MAIL ORDER EXECUTIVE, WAS STRANGLED JULY 2 AS SHE WAS PARKING THE FAMILY CAR IN A GARAGE.

642A. . . .

Burnett reread the story, then put it down. It was fine copy. A homicidal maniac, whose slayings followed no discernible geographical or chronological pattern; a psychopath who struck at random for the mere love of killing.

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But while newspaper editors gloated at the circulation-builder dumped in their laps, certain police officers would be on grim, 24-hour duty trying to find a clever nonentity who murdered young women.

Burnett knew Chief of Detectives Barney Ryan. Burnett had covered crime stories with Ryan, at a remote time when Ryan was still a sergeant. Ryan knew all the tricks. But apparently the strangler did, too.

Burnett sighed and for the moment put the strangler out of his mind. He had to go through the piles of copy Gutowski had arranged. He would spike the stories he didn't want, and edit those he did want. The edited stories would be transmitted on teletype wires to more than a hundred West Coast newspapers.

Ernie Burnett lit another cigarette and got busy . . .

Gutowski yawned. Gutowski always seemed to be yawning.

Burnett grinned. "What's the matter, kid? Tired?"

"You'd be tired, too, if you crawled out of the sack at 4 in the morning."

"That's wire service. We all take our turn. I get up at 5:30 myself."

Gutowski swore. Burnett started to laugh, then cut off the laugh quickly. The nearest teletype machine, the big trunk wire that carried news from the East, was sounding five bells. That meant something hot. Burnett got up to see.

CGO 34
PRECEDE STRANGLER

BULLETIN

CHICAGO, JULY 23 (WP) — THE BODY OF THE SIXTH VICTIM OF CHICAGO'S PHANTOM STRANGLER WAS FOUND TODAY IN A VACANT LOT ON CHICAGO'S NORTH SIDE. POLICE TENTATIVELY IDENTIFIED THE MURDERED GIRL AS HELEN GUTMAN, 18.

905A . . .

Another one, Burnett thought as he tore the bulletin from the printer. The second girl to die in three days.

Burnett didn't edit the bulletin for relay to his clients. It was still early, hours before any of the newspapers on Burnett's wire would be up against a deadline. He knew Chicago would follow with details, fast. Eight minutes later the details came:

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CGO 36
FIRST LEAD STRANGLER

BY WILLIAM JARDINE
WORLD PRESS CORRESPONDENT

CHICAGO, JULY 23 (WP) -- CHICAGO'S PHANTOM STRANGLER STRUCK AGAIN TODAY FOR THE SIXTH TIME IN TWO MONTHS.

THE BODY OF 18-YEAR-OLD HELEN GUTMAN WAS FOUND IN A VACANT LOT ON CHICAGO'S NORTH SIDE THIS MORNING BY TWO BOYS ON THEIR WAY TO SCHOOL.

LIKE THE STRANGLER'S FIVE PREVIOUS VICTIMS, THE GIRL HAD BEEN KILLED WITH A LENGTH OF GREEN SASH CORD.

HER BODY WAS FOUND FACE DOWN IN A PUDDLE OF WATER WHICH FORMED AFTER A HEAVY RAIN EARLY TODAY.

POLICE SAID THE DISARRAYED CONDITION OF HER CLOTHING INDICATED SHE HAD STRUGGLED WITH HER ASSAILANT. HER PURSE AND A MORNING NEWSPAPER WERE FOUND NEARBY.

POLICE COMMISSIONER DAN O'NEILL ARRIVED AT THE MURDER SCENE WITH THE FIRST SQUAD OF DETECTIVES.

HE SAID HE HAD ORDERED CHIEF OF DETECTIVES BARNEY RYAN TO "DROP ALL ROUTINE INVESTIGATIONS AND FIND THIS HOMICIDAL MANIAC."

RYAN TOLD REPORTERS: "THERE'S NO DOUBT IT'S THE SAME PERSON WHO KILLED THOSE OTHER GIRLS. THE TECHNIQUE'S THE SAME. THE TIME ELEMENT'S THE SAME -- AT SOME ODD HOUR WHEN FEW PEOPLE ARE ON THE STREETS. YOU CAN CHALK THIS UP AS NUMBER SIX FOR THE STRANGLER."

POLICE ADMITTED EARLIER TODAY THAT THEIR LAST SOLID CLUE TO THE STRANGLER'S IDENTITY WAS WORTHLESS.

(PICKUP 2ND PGH EARLY: DETECTIVES HAD HOPED, XXX AND DELETE 7TH PGH, BEGINNING: "ALL WE CAN DO," ETC.)
913A . . .

Nice job, Burnett thought, when you consider that someone on the Chicago desk wrote the story in eight minutes. Bill Jardine must have been in a squad

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car with the first police officials to arrive at the scene. He would have telephoned the facts to the desk from a nearby store or residence.

Burnett knew Jardine from his own days at the Chicago bureau, fifteen years ago. Jardine was a nervy beginner then. Now, Burnett had heard, Jardine was a family man with six youngsters and a home in the suburbs.

But bluff, gregarious Bill Jardine was the right man for the strangler story. The cops liked him. Jardine would follow with a new lead, too, as soon as the police learned more about the girl — what she did for a living and where she'd been when the strangler got her.

Burnett had plenty to do in the next hour or so. Jardine's story had to be edited and given to an operator for transmission on the teletype wire. Other stories had to be trimmed, polished, improved.

Then Gutowski called out: "Here's Chicago's color piece."

"Kelley again?"

"Who else?"

Everyone on the circuit knew that Dave Goldberg, the bureau manager at Chicago, doted on color stories. And Jack Kelley was the bureau's color man.

Burnett had never met Kelley. Kelley was a recent import from somewhere in Iowa. As a feature writer, he was so-so, in Burnett's estimation, but he had the makings of a good newsman. Already, his passion for accuracy was legend. Once, he roused a governor from his bed at 2 in the morning merely to verify an insignificant quote.

Burnett joined Gutowski beside the teletype printer. He wanted to read every word on the strangler today. He noted that Jardine's second lead to the main story was scheduled to move as soon as Kelley's story cleared. Kelley's story had nearly cleared now. . . .

CGO 41
WITH STRANGLER

BY JACK KELLEY
WORLD PRESS CORRESPONDENT

CHICAGO, JULY 23 (WP) — EIGHTEEN-YEAR-OLD HELEN GUTMAN WAS A "TYPICAL" SMALL TOWN GIRL.

SHE WANTED TO SEE THE BIG CITY -- TO GET AWAY FROM WHAT SHE THOUGHT WAS THE DREADFUL MONOTONY OF SMALL TOWN AMERICA.

THREE MONTHS AGO SHE LEFT HER HOME IN WATSEKA, ILL., AND CAME TO CHICAGO.

AND EARLY TODAY SHE WAS KILLED BY THE PHANTOM STRANGLER WHO HAS MURDERED FIVE OTHER GIRLS IN THE LAST TWO MONTHS.

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HELEN GUTMAN LIVED IN A DIRTY, BROWNSTONE ROOMING HOUSE ON CHICAGO'S NORTH SIDE.

HER TINY CUBICLE OF A ROOM -- THE WALLPAPER IS PEELING AND THE CEILING IS FADED AND CRACKED -- WAS FILLED TODAY BY NEWSPAPER REPORTERS AND DETECTIVES.

HER PITIFUL COLLECTION OF PERSONAL EFFECTS WAS SCATTERED ON HER DRESSER, JUST AS SHE LEFT THEM TO KEEP HER RENDEZVOUS WITH A HOMICIDAL MANIAC.

THE ITEMS ON THE DRESSER TELL A SORDID STORY OF THEIR OWN.

HELEN OWNED FOUR STICKS OF DIME-STORE LIPSTICK, EACH A DIFFERENT SHADE, PROBABLY COMPENSATION FOR THE RESTRICTIONS OF HER EARLIER LIFE IN A SMALL TOWN.

ONE OF THE SHADES WAS THE GRIM, SYMBOLIC BLOOD RED SHE WORE WHEN SHE WENT OUT EARLY THIS MORNING. HELEN COULDN'T SLEEP, HER LANDLADY TOLD POLICE, BECAUSE IT WAS TOO HOT.

ALONGSIDE THE LIPSTICKS LAY A HOME PERMANENT SET -- A FRAMED PHOTOGRAPH OF VICTOR MATURE, ANOTHER OF ROCK HUDSON -- A COPY OF "MOVIE THRILLS"-- A CHEAP DOLL FROM AN AMUSEMENT PARK.

ONE CORNER OF HELEN'S DINGY ROOM IS PILED HIGH WITH MOVIE MAGAZINES AND LOVE STORIES. HER LANDLADY SAID HELEN SPENT HER FREE HOURS IN THIS ROOM READING ABOUT THE GLAMOROUS LIFE SHE THOUGHT SHE WOULD FIND OUTSIDE THE SMALL TOWN.

PERHAPS HELEN GUTMAN, VOTED BY HER HIGH SCHOOL CLASSMATES "MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED," KNEW BEFORE THE STRANGLER GOT HER THAT THE CITY IS AN ILLUSION.

THAT IT IS JUST A BIGGER VERSION OF WATSEKA, ILL., OR KOKOMO, IND., OR ANYTOWN, U.S.A.

IT WOULD BE KINDER, OF COURSE, TO THINK SHE DIDN'T KNOW THAT YET.

1020A . . .

Very touching, Burnett thought wryly. Apparently, Kelley and Goldberg were making a play for the hick editors. Well, you never could tell about hick editors.

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Burnett tore Kelley's story from the printer and handed it to Gutowski for editing. But he hovered near the printer for a few more minutes. Chicago still held the wire. Jardine's new lead was moving. . . .

CGO 42
SECOND LEAD STRANGLER
BY WILLIAM JARDINE
WORLD PRESS CORRESPONDENT

CHICAGO, JULY 23 (WP) — CHICAGO'S PHANTOM STRANGLER KILLED HIS SIXTH VICTIM TODAY, AN 18-YEAR-OLD WAITRESS WHO CAME TO THE BIG CITY JUST THREE MONTHS AGO "TO FIND ROMANCE."

THE BODY OF HELEN GUTMAN, VOTED "MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED" BY HER HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATING CLASS IN WATSEKA, ILL., WAS FOUND TODAY IN A VACANT LOT ON CHICAGO'S NORTH SIDE BY TWO SMALL BOYS ON THEIR WAY TO SCHOOL.

SHE WAS THE SECOND GIRL TO DIE BY THE STRANGLER'S HAND IN THE LAST THREE DAYS.

LIKE THE STRANGLER'S FIVE PREVIOUS VICTIMS, SHE HAD BEEN KILLED WITH A LENGTH OF GREEN SASH CORD.

NEWS OF THE LATEST SLAYING PRECIPITATED A FLOOD OF TELEPHONE CALLS TO MAYOR HARTLEY O'MAHONEY'S OFFICE PROTESTING POLICE INABILITY TO FIND THE KILLER.

O'MAHONEY SAID HE HAD GIVEN IMMEDIATE ORDERS TO DOUBLE THE NUMBER OF DETECTIVES ASSIGNED TO THE CASE.

MISS GUTMAN'S LANDLADY, FLORA CARBODY, 55, SAID THE GIRL CONFIDED IN HER THREE MONTHS AFTER SHE ARRIVED FROM WATSEKA THAT SHE CAME TO CHICAGO IN SEARCH OF "ROMANCE."

"SHE SAID THERE WAS NOTHING TO DO IN A SMALL TOWN," MRS. CARBODY TOLD REPORTERS. "SHE SAID SHE CAME HERE TO 'LIVE.' WELL, I TOLD HER TO GO HOME WHERE PEOPLE KNEW HER AND LOVED HER, BUT SHE WOULDN'T LISTEN."

MISS GUTMAN WORKED IN A LOOP RESTAURANT AS A WAITRESS.

POLICE SAID MRS. CARBODY TOLD THEM THAT AFTER MISS GUTMAN CAME HOME FROM WORK LAST NIGHT SHE

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COMPLAINED OF BEING UNABLE TO SLEEP BECAUSE OF THE HEAT.

MRS. CARBODY SAID THAT LATER SHE HEARD MISS GUTMAN DRESS AND WALK OUT OF THE HOUSE.

JOHN SEROTA, 67, A BLIND NEWSPAPER VENDOR WHO OPERATES AN ALL-NIGHT STAND TWO BLOCKS FROM WHERE THE BODY WAS FOUND, TOLD POLICE HE SOLD A PAPER TO A "NICE-SOUNDING YOUNG GIRL, WHO SAID SHE COULDN'T SLEEP BECAUSE IT WAS TOO HOT," AT ABOUT 1 A.M.

POLICE SAID MISS GUTMAN PROBABLY WAS ACCOSTED BY THE STRANGLER AS SHE WALKED HOME FROM THE NEWSSTAND.

(PICKUP FIRST LEAD 4TH PGH: HER BODY WAS FOUND, ETC.)

1028A . . .

Burnett reread Jardine's dispatch and then handed it to Gutowski.

"This probably wraps it up for today unless they get a big break," Burnett said.

"Let's hope so. Those hot Congress leads will be moving in a few minutes, just as soon as they recess for lunch."

"Take over," Burnett said. "It's my coffee time."

Frowning, Burnett walked out of the newsroom and headed downstairs.

Later, sandwiched between the usual reports of disasters, scandal, dissension, and momentous political events all over the world, a few more odds and ends on the strangler came through on the wire. . . .

CGO 48

INSERT SECOND LEAD STRANGLER

AFTER 3RD PGH: GREEN SASH CORD.

POLICE SCIENTIFIC DETECTION SQUADS COMBED THE AREA WHERE THE GIRL'S BODY WAS FOUND, BUT ADMITTED NO CLUES HAD BEEN UNEARTHED SO FAR.

"THESE ARE THE TOUGHEST KIND OF MURDERS," ONE DETECTIVE SAID. "THERE'S NO MOTIVE, EXCEPT THAT THE KILLER IS CRAZY."

Then this . . .

INSERT SECOND LEAD STRANGLER

AFTER 16TH PGH: HEAVY RAIN EARLY TODAY.

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A PRELIMINARY CORONER'S REPORT SAID THAT ALTHOUGH THE GIRL'S FACE HAD BEEN SUBMERGED IN WATER FOR NEARLY SEVEN HOURS -- HER HEAD AND SHOULDERS RESTED IN A DEPRESSION IN WHICH RAINWATER FORMED QUICKLY — IT WAS CERTAIN SHE WAS DEAD BEFORE THIS MORNING'S RAIN BEGAN TO FALL.

DEPUTY CORONER THEODORE V. MARCHALAK SAID THE GIRL DIED "SOMETIME BETWEEN MIDNIGHT AND ABOUT 2 A.M., WHEN IT STARTED TO RAIN."

Finally this . . .

CGO 53
INSERT SECOND LEAD STRANGLER
AFTER 6TH PGH: TO THE CASE.
THE MAYOR LATER ISSUED A STATEMENT TO CHICAGO NEWSPAPERS IN WHICH HE PLEADED. . . .

But Burnett suddenly forgot the mayor of Chicago. Something else was on his mind. Something in the morning news report that now stood out like a very sore thumb.

Of course!

It was a slim lead — a real long shot. But if Burnett's theory was correct, it would explain the persistent sense of disquiet he had felt all day.

Unfortunately, any one of a dozen reasonable explanations could demolish his theory. But as far as Burnett's knowledge of police procedure went, it was unlikely they would know . . .

Burnett came to a decision. The long shot was worth playing. He didn't pause to tell Gutowski to take over the desk. He went straight to the bureau manager and began talking.

The bureau manager heard him out, smoking impassively. Then he and Burnett retired to a private office, lugging a big box that contained copies of every story that had moved on the wire from the East during the last month.

They studied the files for nearly an hour. Finally, they telephoned the division copy chief in Los Angeles.

The division copy chief listened to a terse summary of their findings and agreed that a query to Chicago was in order — and on teletype, in code, because it was near deadline for many clients. Telephone might be too slow.

So Burnett wrote a message for transmission to Jack Goldberg, the bureau manager in Chicago. The message made the teletype operator whistle.

"Just send it," Burnett ordered. "Don't talk about it to anyone. But break in and send it."

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Then Burnett retired to his desk. To work. To smoke. To wait.

Finally it came.

First . . .

CG0 71
EDITORS: NEW LEAD STRANGLER UPCOMING. MOST URGENT: CASE IS SOLVED. UPHOLDING FLASH IDENTIFICATION OF KILLER UNTIL LEAD READY TO MOVE. THIS WILL BE A WORLD PRESS EXCLUSIVE.
1242A . . .

A few minutes passed. Burnett could visualize the confusion and wild activity at this instant in the Chicago bureau.

Gutowski was at Burnett's elbow.

"Just heard you scored a beat, Ernie. The bureau manager got a phone call from Chicago.

"Watch the printer," Burnett said. "Five bells. It's coming in now. . . ."

CG0 72
THIRD LEAD STRANGLER
BULLETIN
BY WILLIAM JARDINE
WORLD PRESS CORRESPONDENT
CHICAGO, JULY 23 (WP) — JACK KELLEY, A WORLD PRESS STAFF MEMBER, ADMITTED TO POLICE TODAY THAT HE IS THIS CITY'S "PHANTOM STRANGLER."
(MORE)

CG0 73
ADD THIRD LEAD STRANGLER
"I COULDN'T HELP IT," KELLEY SOBBED TO DETECTIVES IN THE WP DIVISION MANAGER'S OFFICE IN CHICAGO. "I JUST HAD TO KILL. IT WAS AN URGE I COULDN'T CONTROL. AFTER THE FIRST GIRL, I COULDN'T STOP MYSELF."
THE BODY OF HIS LATEST VICTIM, 18-YEAR-OLD HELEN GUTMAN, WAS FOUND THIS MORNING IN AN EMPTY LOT ON CHICAGO'S NORTH SIDE.
KELLEY AT FIRST DENIED ANY CONNECTION WITH THE CRIMES. BUT DETECTIVES WHO SEARCHED HIS ROOM PHONED CHIEF OF DETECTIVES BARNEY RYAN, WHO CON-

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DUCTED THE QUESTIONING OF KELLEY AT THE WP OFFICES, AND TOLD HIM THEY FOUND "MORE THAN A DOZEN" LENGTHS OF GREEN SASH CORD IN KELLEY'S DRESSER DRAWER.

ALL OF THE STRANGLER'S VICTIMS HAD BEEN KILLED WITH GREEN SASH CORD.

CONFRONTED WITH THIS, KELLEY BROKE DOWN.

"ALL RIGHT, I DID IT," HE SAID. "I KILLED ALL SIX OF THEM. I DON'T CARE WHAT YOU DO TO ME NOW."

KELLEY, 26, HAD BEEN WITH WORLD PRESS . . .

There was more, much more, but Burnett stopped reading. The strangler story was cleaned up, so far as he was concerned. He'd move Jardine's lead, then get to work on an urgent United Nations dispatch.

Gutowski tugged at his arm. Burnett suddenly harbored a warm feeling for Gutowski. Burnett suddenly liked everybody. You always felt that way, after scoring a beat.

"How did you dope it out, Ernie?"

"It fits, doesn't it?" Burnett joked. "They were looking for someone who kept odd hours. All those girls were killed at odd hours. And wire service people sure keep odd hours."

"Come on, Ernie."

"All right. The color stories did it — and Kelley's reputation for accuracy."

"Kelley's own stories?"

"Sure. He's been writing color stuff ever since the strangler's first murder. And something was wrong. In his stories Kelley always seemed to know more about the crimes than anyone else — even more than the police. But what put me on the track was the boner he pulled today. Here, take a look."

Decoded, the message Burnett had sent to Chicago read:

ASK KELLEY HOW HE WAS SO SURE ABOUT THE "BLOOD RED" LIPSTICK HE SAID GUTMAN WORE WHEN THE STRANGLER GOT HER. SINCE LANDLADY DIDN'T SEE HER LEAVE THE HOUSE AND NEWSPAPER VENDOR WAS BLIND, ONLY THE STRANGLER COULD KNOW WHICH OF THE FOUR SHADES SHE WAS USING. BODY'S FACE HAD BEEN IN WATER SEVEN HOURS, AND PRESUMABLY OUTWARD EVIDENCES OF LIPSTICK'S EXACT SHADE WOULD HAVE BEEN WASHED OFF OR OBLITERATED. OTHER REPORTERS MIGHT FAKE THE COLOR FOR EFFECT. BUT KELLEY NEVER FAKES. HE KNEW.

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FIND THE INNOCENT

(*continued from page 33*)

by ROY VICKERS

INSPECTOR CURWEN SLAPPED HIS thigh. "Yes, Benjoy, that's a new one — find the *innocent* one! That Higstock!"

"A purely verbal paradox, sir," said Benjoy.

"Eh? Oh, no — I wouldn't call him that! He's not a bad little bloke when you get to know him. He's a law-lawyer, meaning one who knows a hell of a lot about the law and nothing about anything else. I'm not sure he hasn't done me a good turn — even if it hurts. Get me headquarters on the 'phone."

While the call was being made, Benjoy wrote a memo on his own:

Factors in common: Canvey/Stranack/Eddis: Lock routine only. Canvey/Stranack: Flower-trimmed hat; suitcase; girl waits alone in road; approx. 3 A.M. *Canvey/Eddis: lorry and bike; approx. 3* A.M.

Conflicting: Eddis: No girl. Bence: (garage): No hat.

Curwen accepted it with an encouraging smile. He never snubbed a youngster if he could help it.

"Quite right. Proves one of 'em is telling the truth — even if it's only the garage man."

Half an hour later, Curwen made a little speech to the three men.

"You know that you are all three under suspicion. Each of you has given me an account of your movements which conflicts with the accounts of the other two. If you wish to avoid being detained in custody, you will report here every day: you will keep me informed of your movements and absences from home of more than three hours, and you will not change your place of residence."

"If that means that we've all three got to go on living cheek-by-jowl in the lockhouse," said Canvey, "I'd rather be in custody."

"I feel the same way about it," said Eddis.

Curwen cursed under his breath.

"All right! I suppose one of you will have to look after the lock, though it's not my business. The other two must find a new address quickly. Which one of you is going to the lockhouse?"

As a public speaker, Curwen had not learned the unwisdom of asking a question which no one need answer. The silence lengthened.

"So it's like that, is it?" he growled. Headquarters had confirmed Mr. Higstock's ruling, leaving him without a weapon. "Well, if you can't make up your minds, why don't you toss for which is to have the lockhouse?"

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"Odd-man-out!" cried Stranack and banged a coin on the inspector's table. The others did the same, then uncovered.

"Tails!" called Stranack.

"Tails!" called Canvey.

"Heads!" called Eddis. "*I am odd-man-out!*" He looked at Curwen. "I wish the police were superstitious!"

"I shall put up at *The Red Lion*, Inspector," announced Stranack.

"I'll find a cheap hotel, and ring you up," said Canvey.

After they had gone, Curwen, working at his desk, gave a routine order to Benjoy and received no acknowledgment.

"Wake up, boy! What's the matter?"

"Sorry, sir. I was thinking about that girl. I mean — if she has already come back to Renchester — and the killers are at large —"

"They aren't at all *that* large!" said Curwen. "They'll be tailed day and night. The locals can do that — we mustn't slip into selfish habits."

Walking between Jill and the coroner's officer, Veronica was caught by reporters. She did not flinch from the cameras; she answered the questions graciously and fully. She enjoyed it so much that she was little the worse for her visit to the mortuary.

"It wasn't so horrible as I thought it would be," she said, over tea in their sitting room. "Everyone was so kind, Jill, what do you think I ought to wear at dinner?"

"A dressing gown if you like, dear. We'll have dinner sent up, of course."

"Oh, must we? Yes, I suppose we must. I wonder if those snapshots will come out all right. There's a nice photo of me in this week's *Prattler* — they did an interview with poor WillyBee. Jill, do you think I'm callous?"

"Not exactly, but I do think you've written off WillyBee and intend to forget him, beginning now. I expect I'd do the same if I had married a WillyBee. Not being his wife, I rather liked him." Jill hurried on, "There's a lot more you'll have to know about the murder — the provincial papers give more details — so, let's get on with it. First, do any of these names mean anything to you? — Rupert Eddis, Lyle Canvey, Arthur Stranack."

Arthur Stranack! The name typed on an envelope which had caught her eye at Peasebarrow.

"No," said Veronica. "Who are they?"

"That's good," said Jill. "They are scientists on WillyBee's staff — they've been detained by the police. The three of them were staying at a lock on the river, near here — Peasebarrow lock."

"But why are they being detained? They aren't supposed to have —"

"Yes, I believe they are." Jill summarized the movements of the Ford car. "Apparently, two of them went out in this car, while the third stayed behind to mind the lock. It doesn't make clear which did which."

"How could — the one who stayed

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behind at the lock — have anything to do with the murder?"

Jill noticed that Veronica was suddenly taking an interest where she had previously taken none, that she was leaning forward and anxiously awaiting an answer about the man at the lock.

"The man who stayed behind at the lock had a girl friend with him," said Jill.

"Is that what the man at the lock says?"

"No. There's a long interview with the driver from a garage here, who collected the girl at 3 in the morning. She seems to have followed your route, but on a later train. She was driven to Wheatley Junction — and a railway clerk says she booked to Salisbury."

"How frightfully unlucky!" exclaimed Veronica.

"I've given you the details," said Jill, "because it's the sort of thing you don't want sprung on you."

"It would have been awful here without you, darling. You said the girl was picked up at Peasebarrow at 3. I was miles away and asleep at Alice's before 2. The police can't mix us up. How can they? And why *should* they?"

"You must hold on to your nerve," said Jill. "I'll get you a bromide — the shops won't be shut yet — won't be long."

As the door closed, Veronica stared the facts in the face, the most important of which was that Jill was suspicious. Jill could find out much more than any detective, once her suspicion took hold. Residuary legatee! An extra £100,000 for Jill if the marriage settlement were annulled.

As to the lock incident, the man she still thought of as "Peter" had promised that no one should know about it through him. He was the sort of man who would keep a promise like that — or he would not have been "Peter." And if he were to break his promise, she could deny the whole thing — with Alice to back her up in the matter of time.

That woollen crepe coat! Someone might remember it. She must hide it — or, better still, destroy it. How did one set about destroying a coat?

Jill was threading her way through the hall when she became aware of the close scrutiny of a personable young man with a clear eye and broad shoulders, who did not look like a reporter. When she returned from the chemist's, the same young man accosted her.

"Excuse me, Miss Aspland. Mr. Brengast was my chief. I've something to tell Mrs. Brengast which I'm sure she would wish to hear. Could I see her?"

"I'm acting as a buffer," said Jill. "Will you tell me what it's about?"

"Awfully sorry, but I feel I'd have to have her permission. If I could see her for half a minute she could decide. Could I ring your apartment after dinner? I'm staying here."

"I'll tell her what you've said," hedged Jill. "You haven't given me your name."

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"Sorry! I'm Arthur Stranack."

Veronica was virtually incapable of not changing for dinner. Having no one else to dress for, she dressed for Jill.

"You're very lovely, Veronica."

"Am I?" Veronica enjoyed a moment of intense happiness. She must stay lovely — she must never be poor. With sudden clarity, she added, "Most of it comes out of a check book." The tigress in her was waking up. After dinner, she did not wince when Jill told her about Arthur Stranack.

"Arthur Stranack! One of those men in the paper! How funny! What does he want?"

"He said he couldn't tell me without your permission. I gathered it was something about WillyBee. When he rings, shall I tell him you've gone to bed with a headache?"

"No, dear," said Veronica firmly. "If it's really about WillyBee, I'd like to hear it."

In a dinner jacket, Stranack looked slender and well-groomed — a standard-pattern young man of the kind that knows its way about. Jill noticed with anxiety that Veronica was not running true to form. She ought to have been fluttery. Instead, she seemed to bristle.

Stranack's approach was impeccable.

"I'm sorry to intrude at such a time, Mrs. Brengast. But I have what might almost be called a message for you."

"Really? Do sit down, Mr. Stranack. I'm not an hysterical woman, so don't be afraid of upsetting me."

Altogether too crisp for the Veronica she knew, Jill thought, and stood by for action.

"Thanks." Stranack glanced at Jill, sat down, then glanced at Jill again. Jill gave no sign of understanding.

"What did my husband say?"

After another fruitless appeal to Jill, Stranack came out into the open.

"I am sure Miss Aspland will not resent my saying that — I mean, that I ought to speak to you in private in the first instance."

"Shall I go, Veronica?" offered Jill.

"No." Veronica's tone was formidable. "Miss Aspland is my husband's niece and my own most intimate friend. My husband could not have said anything which I would not wish her to hear."

Stranack raised his eyebrows, opened his hands.

"All right, if you prefer it that way. The police do not believe that I was at the lockhouse last night. I'm sorry, Veronica, but I must ask you to tell them I was."

"*Oh-h!*" It was a long-drawn gasp. "Jill! No, let me deal with this. He, Mr. Stranack, asks *me* to tell the police that he was at the lockhouse last night. I've never set eyes on him before. Mr. Stranack!" Veronica stood up. "Will you please *look* at me. Jill, dear, turn that shade so that I get the full light."

Jill was bewildered. Stranack's forceful statement carried its own con-

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viction. But Veronica's cold efficiency shattered it.

"Don't bother about the light, Miss Aspland. I wish I'd been allowed to speak to her alone. Veronica, if you tell the police — privately in their office, or in here, with me present — that will almost certainly be the end of the whole thing. The moment they believe my statement, I drop out of the news — and you never enter it. The police won't accept your blank denial — they'll make you account for every minute of your time yesterday!"

"Do you expect me to believe that you've told the police this wicked nonsense?" demanded Veronica.

"I have told them only that there was a girl with me. Not your name. But I shall have to tell them when I leave here — if you won't do it yourself."

"I can hardly believe you are sane!" Veronica's contempt turned the scale.

"Mr. Stranack," said Jill, "will you answer a question, please?"

"As many as you like."

"There's only one. You say that your companion at the lockhouse was Mrs. Brengast. What time did she leave you?"

"Close to 3 o'clock. A hired car came out to fetch her — from the Hollow Tree garage."

"Thank you for answering." Jill glanced pointedly at the door. "I don't think Mrs. Brengast has anything to add."

"She thinks I can't prove it. And maybe she's right. She didn't leave any evidence at the lockhouse. I helped her not to — I even rubbed out her fingerprints after she'd gone." Stranack had switched his line of approach. "Listen hard, Veronica. The police know that two of us three were concerned in the — the accident that caused WillyBee's death. They don't know which two — and they never will know, unless you tell them. Suppose you're right in believing that they cannot prove you were at the lockhouse, even if they're morally certain? You will save your reputation. And I shall spend the rest of my life under the shadow of suspicion. It's not like you, Veronica. Talk it over with Miss Aspland."

Veronica's confidence in herself seemed to Jill to be positively increased by Stranack's appeal.

"You have made everything perfectly clear, Mr. Stranack," said Veronica, as one humoring a lunatic. "I'm afraid I can't argue any more about whether I'm myself or your friend who was at the lockhouse. Good night!"

Stranack got up. He passed close to Veronica who remained standing. He looked her up and down, his eye resting on the third finger of her left hand. His lips moved as if he were about to speak, but he shrugged and passed on.

After he had gone, his last words thumped Jill's reasoning faculties into helplessness. She walked unsteadily and dropped into an arm-

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chair. Veronica was sitting bolt upright on the settee, looking straight in front of her as if unaware of Jill.

"Veronica! Is there anything in it?"

"I thought you were my friend!"

"Don't dramatize it, dear. I'm your friend and WillyBee's enough to do all I can to get you out of any mess you may be in. But I must know what the mess is."

"I've been spoiled!" exclaimed Veronica unexpectedly. "All my life I've been lucky. And now the luck has changed. Something in this horrible business has slipped, so that everything is fitting into the wrong place. Why did that wretched girl have to go to Wheatley Junction and Salisbury!"

Things did happen like that sometimes, thought Jill. But Stranack's behavior was an inescapable challenge.

"Did Stranack come up here knowing that we should kick him out very much as we did kick him out? And if so, why? That's what the police will ask themselves."

"That's their headache. Jill, darling — if you want me to say it — I swear that I was not at that lockhouse with Stranack or anybody else. And I shall repeat that on oath, even if everything fits into the wrong place and says that I was!"

"Are you going to tell the inspector what Stranack said?" Jill was looking at the telephone. "Or am I?"

Jill's call interrupted a conference, which was the name Curwen gave to his occasional little pep talks to his men.

"I'll be round in half an hour, Miss Aspland," he promised, then replaced the receiver and relayed the information to Rouse and Lissett.

"And just how does Stranack think he'll get away with that if it isn't true?" exclaimed Rouse.

"How does *she* think she'll get away with it if it *is* true?" countered Lissett.

"Anybody can ask riddles," growled Curwen. "I'll see the Chief Constable about the chances of an identity parade for Mrs. Brengast. We shall want the commercial traveler, the garage driver who picked up the girl in the dark, any railmen you can get from Wheatley Junction and Salisbury. Until something comes out of that we won't know whether there are two girls or only one.

"The other line is the detailed accounts those men wrote before we let 'em out. There's that story of a fishhook embedded in the sleeve of her coat. If that's true there'll be traces. And there's the story of the wedding ring thrown into the lock. Did you get an answer from the river Board?"

"Yes, sir," answered Lissett. "They can't get the dredger down river until around midnight tomorrow. They'll start work at dawn on Thursday."

"And there's this hat vs. scarf business to be settled. None of 'em mentioned that face tissue — whatever it's called — which she left in the fireplace. Anything which we know

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she's done and is not reported points at present to Eddis. Any ideas?"

Lissett rashly piped up.

"As we don't know yet whether the killers went straight from the lock to the office —"

"We don't care," interrupted Curwen irritably. "We're not looking for the killers — we've found them. We're looking for the innocent man. Remember?"

At *The Red Lion*, Jill Aspland recounted the interview with Stranack. Curwen, watching Mrs. Brengast, saw nothing but patient endurance. Jill concluded: "It seemed so extraordinary that he should persist. He behaved as if he expected Mrs. Brengast to relent and say that she remembered she was at that house after all."

"I personally don't think it so very extraordinary, Inspector," said Veronica. "He suggested that if I would tell you privately that I was his companion, you would keep my name out of the papers."

"He's right about that!" said Curwen, at a venture. "We could have arranged for you to be called 'Mrs. X'."

No takers. Veronica registered profound indifference. She saw that it would not save the marriage settlement, since Jill would know the identity of "Mrs. X."

"Is it possible he believed it?" asked Jill. "Do doubles really exist?"

"There's always the possibility of mistaken identity," answered Curwen. "We're keeping that in mind. We've had a description of the dress worn by this lady at the lockhouse. It might clear the ground for us, Mrs. Brengast, if you'd let us inspect the coat you were wearing yesterday evening."

"I'll get it," offered Jill.

"You can't, dear," said Veronica. "I left it at the flat."

Jill was silent. She remembered taking the yellow woollen crepe out of the suitcase.

"The inquest is the day after tomorrow," said Curwen. "In the meantime, would you object to our sending a policewoman to your flat to get that coat?"

"Not at all!" Veronica was becoming gracious. "All my light coats are in one cupboard. Tell her to look for a ribbed silk in parchment."

"Silk in parchment!" echoed Curwen suspiciously.

"She'll understand," smiled Veronica. "It only means a kind of yellow."

While Stranack was incurring a heavy bill at *The Red Lion*, Canvey was content with a modest boarding house. Eddis was living economically at the lockhouse where he enjoyed the company of Constable Huggins.

Huggins, being a bachelor, had volunteered to stay at the lockhouse without relief. He hardly called it work, his duties being to operate the lock, if necessary, to prevent anyone entering the house except Eddis, and to keep his eyes open. For the rest, the suspect was as good company as he could ask of a "foreigner"; he never

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took a whiskey by himself and did even more than his share of the chores.

In the middle of the following morning a grocer's van stopped at the lock and deposited Stranack, who was carrying a parcel. Before Huggins could join them, Eddis was already carrying the parcel into the house — to emerge with one of identical appearance.

"His laundry," explained Eddis. "He had mine."

"Thank you, *Mr.* Eddis. I am sorry to have put you to this trouble," said Stranack and hurried to the waiting van.

Huggins moved off, loitering at the lockside. Presently Eddis came out of the house and joined him.

"You heard him call me 'mister'! We've worked together for three years."

"Bit awk'ard like for both of ye," remarked Huggins.

"Yes, but that sort of thing is clowning it." Eddis drew a silver cigarette case from his hip pocket and opened it. Huggins accepted a cigarette. Eddis took one himself, tapped it on the side of the case —

"Damn!" he exclaimed.

The cigarette case had slipped from his hand into the water of the lock.

"It doesn't matter," he added. "I'll dive for it."

"You can't see jest where 'tis, with the sun glittering."

"When you put your face under the water it's like looking into a flood-lit room."

The drop of the weir was three feet; with the downstream gates open, the depth in the lock was barely seven feet. After ten minutes of swimming all over the lock, dipping his face beneath the surface and occasionally diving, Eddis came out and flourished the cigarette case.

"It couldn't have swum over to t'other side of the lock, where you was looking jest now," remarked Huggins.

"It might have," retorted Eddis. "There's a fair-sized leak near the bottom of the left tongue. Makes a strongish underswirl."

"Maybe you was divin' for somethin' besides that there cigarette case, which you found as soon as you looked in the right place?"

"The bloodstained putty knife, of course!" mocked Eddis.

"What you got in your other hand, Mr. Eddis? I ask as a matter o' duty."

"Quite right, old man. Whenever you feel an attack of duty coming on you must — er — fan me for a gat — or do you rustle one for a rod?"

"What you got in that other hand?"

"Damn you, Brother Huggins! I thought you weren't watching." Eddis opened his hand. In the palm was a gold wedding ring.

"I'll have to take it."

"I know. And you'll cause a lot of misery without doing the slightest good. That ring is of no value to the police. If it proves anything at all it proves only that a woman was here

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recently — and Inspector Curwen knows that much already. It doesn't tell you anything at all about the man who was with her!"

At the inquest the police offered only formal evidence as to the finding of the body and its identification. Veronica repeated the word "yes" five times, and was thanked by the coroner, who thereupon adjourned. The funeral was to take place in London the following day.

Veronica had graciously promised to call at headquarters, and a police car had been placed at her disposal. At least, that was how Veronica saw it. With Jill, she was driven to the town hall — to the back of it. Curwen's man opened a door in a brick wall giving on to an open yard in which were a number of young women, surprisingly good-looking, many wearing scarves instead of a hat. They were loitering apparently without purpose.

The Chief Constable had been most helpful. Curwen, from one of the many rooms overlooking the yard, admitted that, as an identification parade, it was irregular in form. But no one could say it was unfair.

After a further delay of twenty minutes, Veronica and Jill were ushered into Curwen's room. Curwen noticed that Jill Aspland was the one who looked as if she were nursing a guilty secret.

"Now, I'm going to tell you ladies exactly what the police position is and I must ask you to regard it as confidential." It was a stock little speech which was always effective except with crooks. "We know there was a woman at the lockhouse on Monday night. We know that she stayed there until nearly 3 in the morning. Most unfortunately the trail of this woman has been confused with your trail, Mrs. Brengast."

"I'm sorry," said Veronica, as if called upon to apologize. "Does it matter very much?"

"We have to disentangle the trails. The man who gave you a lift from Diddington says he put you down about three miles from Peasebarrow lock —"

"If he told you the reason, you'll know why I thought it unnecessary to explain that I had two lifts. I waited — about ten minutes — for the second man, who took me to Renchester station. I don't know his name, nor anything about him."

Curwen smiled. He had expected this answer.

"Did Man Number One happen to mention that he was a traveler in the drapery trade? We showed him, just now, the coat you told us you were wearing when you were sitting next to him on Monday night." Curwen consulted a note. "'Ribbed silk in parchment,' you called it, if you remember. He says the coat you were wearing was a lighter yellow and that the stuff it was made of was '*woollen crepe*'."

"He is mistaken," said Veronica indifferently. "Does it matter what he says about my clothes?"

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"The garage driver," continued Curwen, "says that the lady he picked up at Peasebarrow lock, about 3, was yourself. He identified you just now. Further, the ticket collector at Salisbury says it was you who passed the barrier from the train arriving at Salisbury at 4:15 A.M. — not the one arriving at 12:03 midnight as you told me. The only rebutting evidence we have is that of your sister — who will be regarded as prejudiced in your favor."

"How awful!" exclaimed Veronica. "What must I do, please? If people won't believe my sister, I can't do anything, can I?"

"Let me help. When you arrived at the airport, were you wearing a hat?"

"Yes. A summer straw, trimmed with roses."

"When did you take that hat off, Mrs. Brengast?"

"I didn't take it off — that is, not until I went to bed at my sister's house."

"So you were wearing it the whole time, including the time when you were traveling by train?" When Veronica assented, Curwen went on, "Would you let us have that hat for a short time, Mrs. Brengast?"

"I would — but I've thrown it away."

"Why?"

"Because I didn't want to wear it again. I stepped on it by accident at my sister's, and ruined it."

"I see why so many of those girls were wearing scarves," said Jill. "The chauffeur and the ticket collector must have said the girl was wearing a scarf. The chauffeur can only have seen her by his car lights, which are very distorting. Need Mrs. Brengast concern herself?"

"Mrs. Brengast will wish to help us find the men who killed her husband," said Curwen. "We suspect two of those three men at the lock, but we don't know which two. Each says that he himself was the one at the lockhouse and therefore the innocent one. The unknown woman can settle the matter. If she is deliberately refusing us information, she is liable to be charged with being accessory after the fact of the murder."

It was Jill who caught her breath. Veronica wore the expression of one who is trying to show an interest in someone else's hobby.

"You have denied that you were in Stranack's company. Do you deny also that you were in the company of either of the other two?"

"What a stupid question! Of course I deny it!"

"Good!" said Curwen, pressing the buzzer on his desk. "I will take your formal denial and get you to sign it afterwards. The three men will be in here in a minute."

Curwen glanced quickly at both women. Again it was Jill who showed unease.

Escorted by Rouse, the three men came in and stood in a line near the door. Stranack smiled sadly at Veronica, as if to remind her that she had brought the whole thing on herself. Canvey, in the middle, looked dazed.

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Eddis, Curwen observed, kept his head slightly bent, staring at his shoes.

"Mr. Stranack. You know this lady to be Mrs. Brengast. Do you repeat your assertion that she spent part of Monday night in your company?"

"I do repeat it, Inspector. And I appeal to Mrs. Brengast to admit it before I have to add anything."

"Is it necessary for me to say it all over again?" asked Veronica. "Very well! I had never seen Mr. Stranack until he appeared in my sitting room at the hotel on Tuesday night."

"You're asking for it, Veronica," said Stranack bitterly. "Inspector! As a sort of outward sign — we took her wedding ring off and threw it away. If you drag that lock you'll probably find it in the mud. When you've fitted it on her finger, ask her again."

"Thank you, Mr. Stranack," said Curwen. "Mr. Canvey —"

"I repeat that the lady before me, whom I now know to be Mrs. Brengast, was with me alone at the lockhouse on Monday night until about 3 o'clock. If she denies this, she will obviously deny anything I say about what happened." He made a half turn towards Stranack and continued, "What Stranack said about the wedding ring is true. I can only assume that you have recovered the ring and that he heard about it and is trying to use it."

Veronica caught Curwen's eye.

"How can *both men* have been *alone* with me or I with them at the same time?" she demanded. "You can't make sense out of it even if you suppose that I have a double. I'm sorry — forgot it was to be formal: I have never seen Mr. Canvey until this moment. Is the other man also going to say he was alone with me *at the same time?*"

Eddis made no answer. He was still looking at his shoes.

"Mr. Eddis," said Curwen, "will you please answer the question."

"I will, in my own way, Inspector. I was at the lockhouse on Monday night. I neither assert nor deny that Mrs. Brengast was with me."

Jill cut in.

"There's nothing there for Mrs. Brengast to answer."

"Yes, there is," said Veronica. "I have never seen Mr. Eddis until this moment."

"Does Mrs. Brengast know," boomed Stranack, "that she is protecting the men who murdered her husband?"

"And putting an innocent man in peril?" supplemented Canvey.

"Two silly questions!" said Eddis. "It has not yet been proved that she was at the lockhouse."

Veronica took no notice. Curwen nodded to Rouse and the three men left the room.

Benjoy produced a typewritten statement. Veronica took off one glove and signed it. Curwen's eye was on her gloved left hand.

"Are you wearing your wedding ring, Mrs. Brengast?" he asked.

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"No. This is an extra bit of bad luck. We'd been married nearly two and a half years and I was wearing my third wedding ring. I missed it on Monday morning when I was hurrying to catch the train to Diddington."

"Then it may be in your London flat?"

"It might be. I had forgotten about it until Miss Aspland reminded me on Tuesday, just before you came to see us."

"Where did you buy the second and third rings?"

"I didn't buy them. I didn't know I'd lost them until my husband noticed. Then he bought me a new one, each time."

Curwen observed that Jill looked gloomy and even sceptical. He opened a drawer in the desk.

"Is this your lost wedding ring, Mrs. Brengast?"

"Oh!" Veronica took the ring in her right hand. "I don't know. How does one tell one wedding ring from another? — we didn't have mine engraved. It depends, of course, where it was found?"

"It was found in Peasebarrow lock — in the water," said Curwen. "I want you to try it on, Mrs. Brengast."

"Don't put it on, Veronica!" cried Jill. "If it happens to fit you, it will be another point against you — like the driver saying it was you he picked up."

"I'm no good at this sort of game!" Veronica laughed, drew off her glove, put on the ring, then displayed it on her finger. "A perfect fit!" she exclaimed. She took it off and laid it on Curwen's desk. "And now, Inspector, you'll simply have to find the girl who really was there, or we shall all look ridiculous."

"I'll do my best, Mrs. Brengast."

"That means you'll succeed. I'm ever so grateful for all you are doing. I feel I shall only get in your way if I stay here, so I shall go back to London this afternoon. You have my address, haven't you?"

On the short walk back to the hotel Jill tried to make small talk, but Veronica did not respond. Jill decided that they must come to terms. But when they reached the sitting room it was Veronica who took the initiative.

"Jill, dear, I don't think it was very nice of you to say there were points against me — in front of the inspector, too! What was in your mind?"

Jill thought it a fair question — she had no suspicion of the existence of the tigress.

"There are a lot of points against you. I wanted to warn you not to risk adding to them. But you blundered on. Is it possible you don't realize that the police suspect it was you at that lockhouse?"

"Do *you* suspect that I was at the lockhouse?" The expressive mouth hardened and the lips lost their voluptuousness in a thin compressed line. "Don't dodge it, Jill. I'd rather you told me in a straightforward manner. Do you?"

"I don't know whether you were

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at the lockhouse or not. But I don't believe all the reasons you gave the police to account for your movements."

"What don't you believe?"

"To begin with, you were not a forlorn little thing, alone in Renchester. WillyBee was always telling me how it took you only twenty minutes to find him when all you knew was that he was in Paris. I don't believe that you went to Alice just because you had nowhere else to sleep — you could have gone straight to the flat. There are a lot of small things, too. You know perfectly well that you wore that woollen crepe coat on Monday, but you've fobbed Curwen off with the ribbed silk. And he's found you out. I don't believe you stepped on your hat. You! Stepping on a hat! Finally, I don't believe you lost all those wedding rings. You would have made funny little stories about it and we should all have heard. It adds up that you're playing some game and haven't the sense to tell me what it is."

"I see! That makes it all perfectly plain. You've been watching, pouncing on anything that could be twisted against me."

"Don't be such a fool, Veronica! If you spent the night with one of those men, it's your business —"

"Until you make it *your* business to get my marriage settlement cancelled. Another hundred thousand for the residuary legatee, meaning you!"

Jill's stunned silence only infuriated Veronica.

"You've settled the whole thing, haven't you, Jill! You'll be most nauseatingly nice about it, and make me an allowance while I'm training for some beastly job. Well, you won't! Rather than be patronized by you, I'd kill myself."

"Pull yourself together, Veronica! You're hysterical!"

"I've never been more clear-headed in my life. Nor have you. We both know what we're doing."

She spoke with sudden calm, compelling Jill to take her at her word.

"You actually believe it, Veronica!"

"You thought I didn't guess."

"I thought you were very much what WillyBee thought you — a rather nice kitten. You're leaving in an hour or so, aren't you? I'm staying here. I'll go and book my room. I won't come back to the hotel until you've gone."

"Will it take you all that time to relay this conversation to the police?"

Jill stopped at the door.

"I'm not going to the police. I'm going to each of those three men, in turn. Without the police being present to cramp their style."

Veronica's outburst had been genuine. It was beyond her philosophy that any woman could be altruistic about a large sum of money. Jill saw too much, and knew too much — Veronica wished she had broken with her earlier. The police, she believed, had done their worst and had got nowhere.

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She forgot the woollen crepe coat until she began to pack. Then she remembered that she had taken it from Jill's hand and put it at the back of the wardrobe. When she realized that the coat was not in the wardrobe, she made a systematic search.

In a couple of minutes she accepted the fact that the coat had been taken from her possession.

"Jill stole it and gave it to the police!" she said aloud. This time there was no fury, only self-satisfaction. Jill would soon find out that she had been a treacherous little sneak for nothing!

"The police know perfectly well that I was at the lockhouse, and they can't do a thing about it — or they would have done it already."

She had instinctively grasped the difference between moral certainty and legal proof. Inspector Curwen's little bits and pieces about a ticket collector and a chauffeur had not frightened her into admission — and they were no good for anything else, or he wouldn't have told her about them. As to the woollen crepe, they would find the fishhook embedded in the cuff. And the wretched man would tell them the fishhook story — what a goose she had been to think of him as "Peter"! — and much good would it do them! They would have to prove that the fishhook was the exclusive property of that particular man — which would be impossible. The theft of the coat changed nothing.

At that moment an aluminum bicycle was being hauled out of the river within 300 yards of Peasebarrow lock.

"That bike! I've got it!" exclaimed Benjoy, severely startling his chief, who looked round the room as if for a bicycle.

"Sorry, sir." But his enthusiasm was driving him to further excess. "I know we're looking for the innocent man. But that bike gives us one of the killers!"

"We'll let you down lightly as it's a first offence." Curwen braced himself for a spot of Encouragement Of The Young Officer.

"It's agreed, sir, that the only checkable facts are the girl's doings between leaving the lockhouse and entering the car — lorry plus bicycle passing: girl's dress except hat: suitcase: girl waiting alone in road: name of garage."

"Go on," muttered Curwen.

"The new bit is the bike sequence. Stolen from the yard of Brengast Accessories, dumped in the river close to the lock. By the time schedule, one of the killers could have ridden home on that bike while the other mopped up, returning in the Ford. I don't know which of 'em *did* ride the bike —"

"Nor do I," said Curwen. "Then why bring that up?"

"Stranack and Canvey," persisted Benjoy, "tell the same tale, which is true. Stranack-or-Canvey got the facts because he was on the lock — the innocent man. Stranack-or-Canvey observed the same facts from

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the bike. Therefore Eddis must be the man who mopped up at the office!"

"That's logic. Does you credit, boy!" Curwen beamed like an uncle, then grew wistful. "The trouble about logic is that it only works when the other bloke is logical, too."

"But surely, sir, that wouldn't affect our conclusion?"

"The conclusion's fine! Just what we want!" enthused Curwen. "Only, you see, when a killer knows we're on his trail, he thinks about nothing except how he can dodge the high jump. He thinks of a new way every time he gets the wind up. Illogical, I call it."

"Sorry I interrupted you, sir." Benjoy was crestfallen.

"You've done a fine job, boy! You've got something there. I mean that funny way of talking. Stranack-or-Eddis. Lumping two men together as if they were Siamese twins. I bet they haven't thought of that. It might help us to shake 'em apart — if Mrs. Brengast's coat turns out to be a dud."

Jill Aspland, staying on at *The Red Lion*, had moved to a smaller and cheaper room. That evening she went downstairs to the cocktail bar, ordered herself a dry martini, and lay in wait for Stranack. He saw and tried to avoid her, but she ran him into a corner of the lounge and closed in on him.

"Mr. Stranack, why don't you try to make use of me?"

"I haven't the nerve," he answered smoothly. "And now that you make it easy for me I don't know how. What use could I make of you?"

"Enlist my moral support. I know Veronica very well."

"And you're very fond of her! And I am a man who has become a menace to her social position and may even be a blackmailer and a murderer and a few other oddments. At best I am a discreditable episode in her life. So what do you really want of me?"

"I want to help you —"

"I'm not such a conceited fool as to believe that. You're very lovely, Jill. But I haven't got over Veronica yet — so I'm not so easy as I look."

Jill reflected that she had let herself in for that kind of thing and must take it.

"Besides, you prefer blondes." She continued, "If we may talk sensibly for a moment — it might help you if you could convince me that Veronica was with you. If you can tell me something about her that a stranger couldn't know — even if it's only a characteristic phrase — I could at least influence the police in your favor."

"Then I'll tell you something very characteristic. Your friend said 'yes' when a decent woman would have said 'no'."

"And a decent man wouldn't have asked her?"

"True. I am the sort of man whose company nice women should avoid."

"Then I'll tell Curwen you turned me down."

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Jill was no policewoman. Her assault on Eddis the following morning was hardly more successful. She hired a car to take her to Peasebarrow.

Huggins felt it his duty to hover about during the opening civilities.

"Mr. Eddis, I particularly want to speak to you alone. Could we walk along the road or go somewhere in the car?"

Eddis took time to answer. "Don't think me intentionally rude, but it really would be better for you to tell Curwen I had nothing to add."

"I've not come on behalf of Curwen."

Eddis shrugged, then turned to Huggins.

"I say, old man, would you mind going a nice, long way off where you can't hear what we're saying? If you sit close to the weir you'll find it drowns the human voice. Then I needn't go into Renchester in Miss Aspland's car."

"Thank you," said Jill when Huggins had removed himself. "Your statement to the police wasn't meant to be taken seriously, was it?"

"Oh, no! It was just a formula. It deceives nobody, but it enables me to keep a promise — which I intend to go on keeping, whatever the cost to myself. It's not easy, you know, to — ask you to go — when it would be so much more agreeable to ask you to stay to lunch."

That at least was civil. Jill smiled.

"But, surely, if we all know that Veronica was here —"

"If we know that, we know that she bitterly regrets it. The bitterness has blotted out all decent feeling. My promise, however, remains."

"I don't know anything about moral philosophy, and you probably do. When you gave that promise, did you know it might cost your life? And if you didn't, is the promise binding?"

"Of course it's not binding!" As Jill looked astonished, he explained, "Can you believe that I'm a moonstruck romantic, willing to die a shameful death rather than betray the honor of a lady? Honor, my foot! She's sunk her honor in the mud by her present behavior. I'm keeping my promise as a device — to protect myself."

"I don't begin to understand. As I see it, you're out of danger as soon as you prove she was here with you."

"There's the rub! How could I prove anything? Did she whisper to me some little secret of her youth which I could repeat to you? She did not! She whispered nothing but the things we all whisper. Why does my attitude puzzle you? You're her friend. Don't you know, as I do, that she is lazy, mean, greedy, cowardly, and cruel — which means unscrupulous? You do! Perhaps that is why you wish to help a stranger, meaning me, to destroy her entirely false reputation?"

"I'm not helping Veronica to hang an innocent man. If you would tell me something about her that only an intimate friend would know, it might be useful."

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"I can tell you something about her that you do *not* know," he answered. "She has a touch of genius. She is a great liver — a lover of life as such — who can yield everything to the beauty of a moment. It is she who is the moonstruck romantic. She will see, in my keeping my promise, a tribute to her personality — a gratitude for her kisses that is greater than my desire to go on living without her. Tennyson plus Hollywood plus all the croons of the crooners! She will find in it the moment of beauty for which she will sacrifice what's left of her reputation." He laughed loudly. "At least, I hope she will! It's my one and only chance of her owning up to the police that she was with me."

Eddis was impregnable. Without reason, she believed that Canvey would be more manageable. She did not know his address and had to wait until next morning. She buttonholed him as he left the town hall after his daily report. He accepted her suggestion for morning coffee, and himself took the initiative.

"I know what you're trying to do and I'm immensely grateful. But I don't think you'll get any sense out of me. I've lost my bearings. My mind has become a cracked record. '*I was at the lockhouse — lockhouse — lockhouse.*' Even Curwen winces. You've heard of the murderer's conscience, haven't you?"

The waitress, bringing coffee, made comment impossible. Then Canvey continued, "The murderer's conscience is his horror at what he has done to himself. He has cut himself off from humanity, turned himself into a public exhibit, and in every man's eyes he sees nothing but a sanctimonious gloat."

"But if you have *not* committed the murder?"

"You'd be surprised what little difference that makes! Until recently, I was one of three men working together, in a close comradeship of reciprocating talents. Now I am one of three terrified scoundrels, each bending his faculties to insure that the other two shall go to the gallows instead of himself."

The words had been hurled at her like stones. She caught one and hurled it back.

"Then do it properly! Bend your own faculties to telling me something about Veronica I know to be true."

"I can tell you everything about her. She exposed me to myself. I looked into her eyes and saw myself as a superman and her as my fitting mate. She showed lots of nice feeling in declining my offer to see her into the car. That's everything about Veronica. You will be too wise to believe a word of it. You will tell me I have been talking heady nonsense and you will be right."

"Look at me, please," said Jill. "Do you see any hypocritical gloat in my eyes?"

"No, dear. You wouldn't know how. But what have I really said to you? '*I was at the lockhouse — lockhouse — lockhouse*'."

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After he had gone, Jill realized that Canvey had overwhelmed her — Stranack had snubbed her — and Eddis had bypassed her. And still she did not know for certain that Veronica had been at the lockhouse. Police work was much too difficult for amateurs — that was only too obvious.

When she returned to *The Red Lion* she was handed an official slip from Inspector Curwen requesting her to come to his office at 3:15 the following afternoon. No doubt, thought Jill, to be told that she was an interfering little fool.

Scotland Yard is an abstraction, incapable of human emotion, but its servants may be as sensitive to ridicule as anybody else. Renchester was laughing at Scotland Yard, and Curwen knew it. Nothing but a quick, clean finish would wipe that tolerant smile from the face of the ever-helpful Chief Constable.

At 3 the following afternoon, Eddis, Canvey, and Stranack presented themselves by request in Curwen's office. They were received as welcome additions to a party already consisting of Mr. Higstock, Stranack's solicitor, and Sergeant Rouse and Detective Constable Lissett, to say nothing of Benjoy in his alcove. While they were seating themselves at the trestle table, Curwen provided chatter.

"I've been admiring that portable air conditioner which you gentlemen invented. The scientific part of it was a bit over my head. Mr. Marchmont explained that it was a brilliant combination of well-known principles. Like this little alibi of yours, if you don't mind my saying so."

"It sounds as if you've found a clue in the air conditioner," chirped Stranack.

"We don't use clues much, nowadays. Juries don't like 'em, so we give them evidence instead. We've got some on the train due here at 3:10. Mrs. Brengast."

"A repeat performance?" suggested Canvey.

"Same star in a new role, supported by a couple of policewomen, who are with her on the train," explained Curwen. "Meaning we've obtained *proof* that she was the girl at the lockhouse. It'll be short and sharp, this time. I shall ask her one question — which of you three was her companion. If she doesn't answer that question with one of your names, I shall charge her with being accessory after the fact of the murder of her husband. That's what the policewomen are for. You can work out for yourselves which way she'll choose."

Curwen paused. In the silence, Benjoy dropped a pencil which bounced on the parquet floor, making him blush.

"I was wondering whether two of you would like to get it over before Mrs. Brengast comes."

Considered as a get-together speech, it was a failure. Eddis glanced in turn at the others, like a chairman of directors taking a vote. All three

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registered polite indifference. Curwen admitted to himself that their nerve was superb.

Benjoy's telephone rang.

"The inspector is in conference," asserted Benjoy. "Oh! Noted! . . . Noted! . . . In half an hour. Thank you!" Benjoy replaced the receiver, typed a message and took it to Curwen.

P-W. Constance Negus reports from Honston station: (begins) Mrs. Brengast flung herself from train and was killed by oncoming train (ends) Negus adds: will ring in 30 minutes.

Curwen passed the slip to Mr. Higstock.

"Thank you, Inspector. This, of course, does not concern me in relation to my client."

When Rouse and Lissett had read it, Curwen laid the message on the table. Eddis picked it up and read it aloud. Stranack alone revealed consternation.

There was a movement at the table.

"Then, if we've nothing further to discuss —" Eddis rose, as if to adjourn the meeting.

"Sit down, please," said Curwen. "It's still in my mind that you gentlemen might like to wind it up of your own accord. There'll be weeks of waiting before you come up for trial, and you aren't like the crooks who always kid themselves that there'll be a miracle in court. Take a few minutes to think it over."

A short silence was broken by Canvey.

"You've given us nothing to think over, Inspector," he said. "It would help me and my fellow suspects to come to a decision if you could give some guarantee that you're not bluffing. I mean, you are behaving as if the stage were still nicely set for Mrs. Brengast to do her act. Her death must be a bit of a blow for you."

"It's not a blow for the police — except that we are required to try and save public time and money — and she would have helped there. I'm inviting a confession. You ask for a guarantee that I'm not pulling a fast one. Fair enough! I'll tell you what each of you did after you tossed odd-man-out that night."

"Pardon me, Inspector," — Mr. Higstock never lost his diffidence — "if the name of my client is used to imply a compromising act on his part I shall be compelled to object."

"That won't arise until I mention his name," said Curwen. "I shall lump 'em all together, and they can divide themselves up." He turned his back on the solicitor.

"Number One stayed at the lockhouse, where he was visited by Mrs. Brengast. Numbers Two and Three drove in the Ford to the depot. Number Two hit Brengast with that iron lever and killed him. Numbers Two and Three carried the body into the Daimler, put it in the sand bin, drove back to Renchester, dumped the Daimler, and returned to the depot. Here it was agreed that Number Two should mop up the traces of the crime, which he did, forgetting

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that there would be blood between the floorboards. You left a trail so clear that you might as well have tied a label to the corpse: 'This was done by two of the men at the lock-house.'

"While Number Two was busy in the office, Number Three took the bicycle which was standing in the yard. Riding that bike, he arrived just as Mrs. Brengast was leaving the lock. He saw her face in the light of his bike lamp. He may have known her before by sight, or he may have recognized her from a portrait in *The Prattler*, a copy of which was found behind the sofa in the lock-house. He skipped off the bike, crept back on the verge of the grass, and watched proceedings.

"Some time before 11 the next morning, the two killers got anxious. Each of 'em, without consulting the other, worked out an emergency alibi. At the lock, one day and night was pretty much the same as another. Why not claim to have been the man who stayed at home? One of you knew that Mrs. Brengast had been there. You took a bet that she would not ruin her own reputation by coming forward and blowing your tale. We made the mistake of pinching all three of you. Before we had to let you go, each of you had written a detailed account of what was supposed to have happened during the night at the lockhouse.

"Up to that point, each of the three of you wanted to prove that he was at the lockhouse and that the other two were the liars. It was all against all. The fact that we had to let you go opened your eyes to the strength of your position. The two killers were safe so long as not a single one of the three of you could *prove* he was at the lockhouse.

"The only weak spot all along was Mrs. Brengast. You found out that I had seen her. The fact that you were not arrested again told you that she had not admitted having been at the lockhouse. But would she lose her nerve? Not if you could help it! One of you tried to see her alone, but Miss Aspland hung around. You asked Mrs. Brengast to admit she was with you, quickly and quietly, to escape publicity. When she laughed at you, you very smartly told her what you really wanted her to know, even though Miss Aspland was present. You made it quite clear that if she were to keep on denying that she was at the lockhouse, nothing at your end could upset her story. She took your tip.

"All you had to do was to dig yourselves in. Nobody's case must be strong enough to prove he was there — nobody's case must be so weak as to prove he was not there. So Number Two and Number Three got together and pooled their information, strengthening their combined position and weakening Number One's. You had spotted that Mrs. Brengast was not wearing a wedding ring. If it had been dropped by accident in the lockhouse, you knew we should have found it. Therefore you figured it

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might be in the lock. If there was no wedding ring in the lock, all you had to do was put one there — and fish it up, with Huggins looking on. More probably it was Mrs. Brengast's ring that was actually fished up. By distributing that ring story to all three of you, you kept us guessing."

The strain was beginning to show itself. Canvey was sucking his thumb; Stranack's forehead was glistening; and Eddis was slowly rubbing his ear. Curwen was anxious not to let up on the pressure. He turned to the solicitor.

"Very clever, that analysis of yours, Mr. Higstock! It kept us chasing one red herring after another. A merry-go-round! As you very kindly pointed out to me at our last meeting, we had to find the innocent man.

"The innocent man — Number One — said goodbye to Mrs. Brengast who, for reasons of her own, preferred not to be accompanied to the road. He stood by until the car picked her up about one hundred yards from where he was standing. Number Three, the man on the bike, saw everything that Number One saw.

"So we have two men able to tell substantially the same true tale, and a third able to claim all the known facts whenever he chooses. Now, Mr. Higstock, I'm going to ask your client a question.

"Mr. Stranack, you told me — and as you wrote in your memo before you were released — that the car came from the Hollow Tree garage. It did. How did you know?"

"I advise you not to answer," warned Mr. Higstock.

"But he knows the answer already," returned Stranack. "I know the car came from Hollow Tree because I was in the sitting room when she made the call."

"She did *not* ring the Hollow Tree," said Curwen. "She rang Weston's. They passed the call on to Hollow Tree, without telling Mrs. Brengast they were doing so. Benjoy, show him the affidavit, or he'll think I'm bluffing.

"You saw too much from that edge of grass, Stranack. You saw the name 'Hollow Tree' on the car. The innocent man was on the lock *a hundred yards away*, and could not have read it."

"Answer no more questions!" Mr. Higstock was very nearly shouting.

"I don't think the inspector is asking a question," said Stranack. "He is describing his earlier errors."

"Quite right," said Curwen amiably. "It was the error of wasting time on the two guilty men. Now try this one, Stranack. Let's have it, Benjoy!"

Benjoy got up, opened a cupboard, and brought out the yellow woollen crepe coat, on a hanger. He turned it and swayed it before the three men as if he were trying to sell it.

"Now, you three gentlemen who were all at the lockhouse that night with Mrs. Brengast will recognize that this is the coat she was wearing. Stranack, can you tell me something important about this coat. If you

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can tell me the right thing, the evidence we have against you will fall apart."

"I'd love to give you the right answer, Inspector, but I simply can't afford to offend my solicitor."

"Eddis?"

"I neither affirm nor deny that I know anything especially important about that coat."

"It doesn't matter," said Curwen. "I'm only trying to make you see that you haven't the ghost of a leg to stand on . . . You, Mr. Canvey?"

Canvey put his hands to the crown of his head and stared at the coat.

"She was wearing it," he muttered. "But you said 'something important.' I can't think of anything important about that coat."

Curwen's confidence seemed to vanish. Rouse coughed.

"It's in your notes," prompted Curwen.

"But think of what I've been through since I wrote them!" Canvey was still gazing at the coat. "Wait a minute — there was something I had to do to it. I've got it! In the fold of the right cuff there should be a fishhook, or traces of a fishhook having been embedded there. For God's sake, let me out of this, Inspector!"

"All right, Canvey, you're out. If you want a receipt for your fishing rod, they'll give it to you in the next room." Curwen paused. "A fishhook!" he repeated, opening a drawer. "A fishhook in that coat proves nothing in itself. But look at this hook closely. You'll see there's about a sixteenth of an inch of gut still attached to it. That gut was broken off with a thumbnail."

He held up what appeared to be a thin wire with a loop at one end.

"This broken gut was taken from Canvey's rod. Microscopic examination proved that it was broken from this hook — which was taken from Mrs. Brengast's coat. Fortunately for Canvey, he never used his rod again. We took this gut from his rod."

"Good enough!" growled Eddis. "You've proved that Canvey is the innocent man." He glanced at Stranack, who nodded.

"I was walking about the room," continued Eddis, "using that lever as a sort of baton to emphasize my remarks. Brengast thought I meant to hit him with it. When he drew his gun, I had to lash out. I only meant to stun him, of course."

"I cut in and helped — it seemed the safest thing to do," said Stranack.

"Technically murder," remarked Mr. Higstock, with detachment. "The Prosecution will include a count of manslaughter, on which they will probably be convicted."

In the corridor, Canvey ran into Jill Aspland, who had come out of the adjoining room.

"You were at the lockhouse!" she cried. "When you made a broken record of it, I believed you."

Again Canvey looked into a woman's eyes and saw a reflection of himself — this time in the guise of a battered man who had been lonely all his life until that moment.

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